

The Hotel Brain



Paul Ash

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the hotel brain 1999

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this work may go out to:

Rob:
for taking my gun away when I had the first Nervous
Breakdown

Richard, Dug and Kaitlyn:
for keeping me alive

The Girl Who Said She Didn't Matter:
for instigating the whole thing

my imaginary friends
George, Logic and even Emotion:
for carrying me through all of it

and of course...
the nameless providers of the soft and perfect fuel

Mongoloid he was a mongoloid
Happier than you and me

Mongoloid he was a mongoloid
And it determined what he could see

Mongoloid he was a mongoloid
One chromosome too many

Mongoloid he was a mongoloid
And it determined what he could see

And he wore a hat
And he had a job
And he brought home the bacon
So that no one knew

Mongoloid he was a mongoloid
His friends were unaware

Mongoloid he was a mongoloid
Nobody even cared

- Devo

part 1

6.19.98 / 1.50 pm

direct transmission/Logic:

there was no opportunity to make direct contact with suspects outside of their element>
possibility of contact occurred at 1.08 pm on this day>
probability of reversal too high to move into position>
two suspects (one minor and one major) were identified visually>
key suspect was not identified>
only minor suspect noticed this agent>
conditions were too flexible and so an alternate approach was indicated>
course of action taken: make necessary transfer and leave without being noticed>

out>

Logic stares residedly at the cursor oscillating against the end of the sentence. He smacks the keyboard, deleting the message and planting a jumble of words and symbols in it's place.

He forces a hot whisper through clenched teeth, lights another cigarette and slams it into the thick black glass ashtray. "Conditions flexible? Possibility of reversal of position? He doesn't actually expect me to swallow..."

Logic pushes the Bakelite "send" button embedded in the steel speaker. "Logic. Direct system request."

He waits, a long draw on the cigarette, a rapid exhale sends smoke into the middle of the room. "Reversal of position...." He shakes his pendulous head.

The speaker throws out a series of low tones indicating the system is ready to receive a voice command. Logic

wedges the cigarette back in the ashtray, the filter snaps off. "Get me Paul on a voice line immediately."

"Conditions flexible my ass, what he *means* to say is he was too personally involved to maintain under questioning." The phone rings, he flips on the speaker and lights another cigarette.

Paul's voice cracks against the radio static. "Yeah, what's up?"

Logic leans into the speaker for effect, he allows smoke to drift out with the words, also for effect. "So what happened out there, I read your generals as well as the last direct to me. Everything indicates you were ready when you left. We've spent days working out your strategy in all possible circumstances."

Logic's shoulders hunch and burn from stress, he gets up and paces across the conference room.

He is a stout man about 4' 7" tall, and 2' 8" wide. The continual slump he carries makes him appear even shorter than he actually is.

The arms of his oversized square bi-focals are wrapped in layers of old yellow cellophane tape. A paper clip sticks in one of the screw holes to hold one arm to the rest of the frame.

Even when he puts on a fresh pair of black polyester pants and striped button shirt he looks disheveled. Logic always wears the same outfit, saying he has more important things to focus on and there are enough distractions around here already.

Paul's voice has an exasperated tone with guilty undercurrents. "Well, it seemed to be the most likely position, why move beyond the boundaries. What information could really be gleaned? Are we even looking for information anyway? No, we're looking for confirmation and resolution. Would the repercussions of contact with a lateral suspect outweigh the benefits? (Which you must realize by now there most likely would be none.) She wasn't even in visual range."

Logic shakes his rapidly swelling head. "Well, we don't know that, we have no information to go by as a result of your continual lapses."

He starts to make a puzzled face for Paul's benefit but realizes it would only be wasted on the speakerphone. "You ran out of there before you could even assess the situation. If you expect me to even think of constructing a matrix to deal with this we do need information."

He begins to arrange the series of pegs in the matrix for the thousandth time this month. "And do me a favor, stop it with the suspect talk already. How the hell are we expected to deal with the reality of this situation with you making it sound like a military exercise."

Paul waits out a loud group of school children walking by. "Look, I don't know what's happening here, but that's the way it comes out. Maybe you should pay more attention to what I'm saying instead of how I'm saying it. Anyway, to the important part."

He pauses, a long sigh, the sound of trucks and a bridge in the background. "They're already suspicious of us Logic, if we were to have made contact it may have only served to reinforce their opinion and weaken our position."

Paul sounds tired and is obviously becoming increasingly irritated.

"Anyway, it's been a rough day. I really don't want to have to explain my decisions, or my language. They're out there and you know it, now get off my back. I'm lucky I didn't wind up barricading the bunker again. If you need to, write a counter report in a direct to me and I'll consider your argument. Right now I don't want to bother with your need to work this situation out through a matrix. We've been approaching this through your methods since Emotion took a back seat. It isn't working Logic, it just keeps coming back at us; the same puzzle over and again. There's no solution. Figure it out already."

George lumbers into the front room. Old green and vinyl couch cracking at the corners, a worn brown carpet like a 1960's Brooklyn apartment, dark wood grain paneling service heavy curtains where the windows should look out of.

Emotion sits at an old school desk in the corner re-reading crumpled notes. He crosses out corrections made by Logic and mutters to himself.

George stops and watches him for a moment. "Hey Emotion." He waits for a response but Emotion is too engrossed in his muttering.

George takes a couple of steps closer. "Um, Emotion?" Still no response. "Okay, well I'll see you later." He walks into the conference room without knocking: heavy brass and silent knob, the door sweeps slowly shut with a muffled chunk.

An oval table extends through the center of the room, old blinds and window sills painted over in thick lead pastel.

A nineteen forties bureau carries the archaic computer terminal, blanketed between useless notes organized in calculated piles.

An oversized wooden desk with a black top sits centered against the wall next to the naked windows.

It's dark outside. It's always dark outside. There's nothing outside.

The right two thirds of the desk are covered with piles of paper, multi colored pegs, a dictaphone, and several stacks of small cassette tapes. The other third is perfectly wiped down and empty. The speakerphone keeps ringing.

Logic is staring at the corner where the wall meets the ceiling. He doesn't turn around when George walks in, just points silently at the bottle of gin on the floor.

"Oh, so I guess you've heard then." George grabs a glass from the desk, squeezes two lime wedges over ice, adds gin, and tonic. "Um, who are you calling?"

Logic still looks at the wall to ceiling junction as if trying to renegotiate the median point. "Yes, I just talked

to him, he went there and didn't even gather the slightest bit of information."

"Huh? Where did he go?" George sips his drink and hangs up the phone.

Logic turns around. "Huh? Oh." He points at the phone. "The idiot. He was in possible direct contact and didn't even try to get any more information." He slumps into the chair and stares sadly over the peg board matrix in shambles on the desk.

George rolls his eyes. "Fuck are you high? I'm talking about the real situation, not the disjointed illusions the three of you seem to want to torture yourselves with. Frankly, I'm surprised you haven't figured out how much of a waste of time that whole thing is. Well, I'm sort of surprised, you do seem to have these lapses..."

He pulls a wad of crumpled bar napkins and spent envelopes from the pocket of his German issue cargo pants. "A certain previously innocuous contact from the past appears to be splitting certain parties off into hostile groups. There may be a very real threat. The biggest problem though? We seem to be heading into a fray, and none of you are able to focus on anything but that lunatic."

George straightens the notes over the table and grabs a red marker. "Look at this."

He marks coordinate points at tangents from the center and left sides. "So here are the confederates, which are of course operating within boundaries of realistic generation, and here are those who are not. As you can see some coordinate points join, that may indicate cross toleration, and therefore possible nullification. But we still need to be conscious of the flexibility factor."

Logic turns slowly away from the matrix and makes a puzzled face. "What are you talking about? Will you tell me what our subjects of tension are before you start cluttering my desk?"

George stops arranging the mess of disjointed notes. "Oh, huh, I figured you would have gotten my transmission. I guess you were too busy with bull shit." He pulls a printout from his t-shirt pocket.

Logic reluctantly takes the printout and reads, he mumbles without looking up. "Holy fuck, Paul hasn't seen this yet has he?"

George sips contemplatively at the gin and tonic and sits back into in the leather chair. "Well, I can't answer that for sure, for some reason it came through in a direct system message to me. I figured you got one as well. Regardless, let's assume we're the only ones, so we should discuss our position before sending anything out."

Logic sits silently for a minute, glancing at the printout suspiciously. He nods and pushes the send button.

"Logic. Direct system request." He waits for the tones. "Send Emotion a voice direct to go down to resources and pick up a list of rations, the list consists of things on his personal list which haven't been restocked in a week, and a bottle of Johnny Walker Black. Then send him up to sensory to review his most recently accessed memory footage. Keep him occupied for at least an hour. Emotion is in the front room."

George nods approval over the whiskey. "Good thinking bubula, we should probably stock up."

Logic swivels back to the notes and moves them around the desk, trying to arrange the randomly torn elements into a recognizable shape.

"We don't want him getting a hold of this at all. The last thing we need is for him to fly off the handle and take over. He'll wind up sending Paul out to explode over the whole situation."

He pulls the desk drawer open. "Okay, so I think the best way to deal with this is to first identify the confederates and perpetrators."

George makes an I already did that face and taps the bar napkin in the left corner of the forced square. "I already did that. See, look at the nice picture. Each perp has been identified and related to their position in reference to the corresponding coordinate points."

Logic slowly pulls the drawing across the desk and looks at it, he tries not to say anything about it being drawn on a bar napkin. "Oh, huh, well that's excellent. So

the next step is to maneuver them into position; to block any penetration into the pivotal points of the situation."

He extracts a compass from the pile of debris on the other side of the desk. "We should number the positions in reference to the pivot points ,and figure out how each confederate relates to each perpetrator."

He pulls a file from the mound on his desk with an accuracy clearly indicating he knows exactly where everything is. "Are there any elements in the situation which are playing off both ends of the grid?"

George studies his notes. "Yes." He slides a used envelope across the desk. "The authorities are supposedly neutral of course, and Paul having the golden mouth and the well connected lawyer... we can assume unless some level of evidence is submitted they will remain neutral. But other than that, Bradley, here at W5, is working through the situation on both levels. We should negate him unless he starts to show a concrete position. But he might need to be diverted and neutralized if he starts to pull off and manipulate any information."

Logic slashes a line just above the center point of the matrix, labels it W5 and places a white sticker over the generation point. "Agreed, all we need is to have him running misinformation in either direction. Just get rid of him if he starts any trouble."

George makes a concerned face. "You mean kill him?"

Logic looks up with a narrow frown. "Don't be stupid. He's proven to be relatively passive and can be manipulated if the tables start to turn in our favor. He'll obviously go with whatever system seems to be easiest or just stay out of it."

He starts drawing junction points across the lines in the matrix (indicating interactive potential), and makes notes regarding all elements involved along with their prescribed positions, and possible fluctuation routes.

He looks up at George then back down again absently, as if he's staring through the desk. "So where are the confederates?"

George looks at him for a second. Logic's face is contorting which usually means he's running calculations on

more than one situation at once. He pulls his tobacco from the pocket in his t-shirt and starts to roll a cigarette. "C'mon Logic, you're obsessed, why don't you have another drink, try to focus a little, and take an actual look at my notes."

Logic looks at George directly, he doesn't pour himself another drink.

George lights the cigarette and picks up one of the envelopes. "Look, it's right there, the confederates which are Robl and Chi have strong positions in relation to the perpetrator, which is L8. I really think you should make yourself that drink Logic, a cushion may be indicated."

Logic considers George's suggestion and starts to make another gin and tonic. He grabs a lime wedge and squeezes it into the drink, spattering juice all over the desk.

He ignores this and continues to mark the matrix, absently wiping the lime juice as he writes.

"We're lucky in this sense, the Robl and Chi in a potentially effective position part. Maybe this is just a scare after all."

He resigns himself to grabbing a rag from the floor and wipes off the desk. "Most of the people who are going to follow L8 don't have any weight on our position anyway; being mainly a bunch of inebrates. So why worry about it." He puts down the rag and starts to fumble with the Nicole matrix again.

George walks around the desk and pushes in front of the Nicole matrix.

"Not so fast, it's not time to start with the bull shit yet, if ever. We still need to find the junction points, if we let it all come down without any guidance, especially with the threat of the authorities being involved...well, we really need to predict the outcome on this one."

George pulls out the "time ruler" and hands it to Logic. "I think you'll need this."

The time ruler was invented by Logic during a relentless bout with self imposed necessity. It was conceived of on the idea that time is a tangible, which only exists by definition.

The time ruler measures the time variable in a matrix by calculating the distance between coordinate points, in relation to the component force variable.

The relative angle is predetermined by an element's interaction (an element being a person or circumstance), with the other elements in the matrix in relation to their gravitation to effective *pivot points*.

A pivot point is a point of intersection where a situation can move down one of several pathways; through different situations to resolve at different circumstances of termination.

Time is the only variable which is not relative to the matrix structure directly. Or more accurately, time is only relative to the matrix on the level of how it reflects the initial thrust of the element, it's interaction with other elements in relation to that thrust, and any effective termination based on the longevity of elements integral to that respective outcome.

Time being completely subjective and therefore inherently flexible, these effects vary considerably.

The actual definition of time exists only through the placement of standards which allow for an illusional constant. Even when subjectively placed, time is always redefined to fit with the standard.

The idea of time as a tangible by standard definition, which only exists in a flexible form based in relativity, was initiated by Logic after an all night thinking binge. The idea was easily accepted by the others in the group (although Emotion slept through the meeting). The time ruler followed quickly once Logic realized he had no concrete way to represent his new theory.

Logic shoos George away from the desk with both hands. "Okay I'll leave the peg board alone. Can I have my desk back now?"

George looks at him for an indeterminate amount of time, he decides Logic isn't lying and heads to the window to stare out at nothing.

Logic glances over to make sure George isn't watching. Satisfied, he makes a doing something secret face and starts in on the Nicole peg board matrix again.

He mutters to himself shaking his pendulous head. "Well, the situation doesn't seem to have a termination point. How am I supposed to figure this out without enough information to base a termination point on."

George turns and looks at Logic. "Huh, You have all the major components, what are you talking about? I thought it may have two possible termination points..." He notices Logic is wasting more time on the Nicole matrix again.

"Shit, will you stop it with that for just a minute? It seems to me the important situation would only appear to have no definite termination point when it actually has two. (You would likely realize this if you would actually give it some attention.) One being confrontation, and the other a slow fade; we could eventually wind up just ignoring it." He places his glass on the window sill.

"For one thing, the perp could have a point in which he realizes his motives have no real basis. Of course he'll be too embarrassed to admit it, but it *will* get him to leave us alone. This could be placed by Paul actually explaining this, although at this point it seems that isn't an option. Any discourse with Paul over the matter will only heat up the situation, especially when Paul starts to pick at the lack of evidence. It's unlikely he'll just realize he's wrong and just leave the subject alone though. I figure our best strategy at this point is to start guiding the confederates into position."

Logic shakes his head trying to appear focused. He strains to drift one eye towards the Nicole matrix but fails.

Logic has been trying to train his eyes to focus on two things at once. He figures this will increase his efficiency by about 40%. He doesn't have very effective physical control, so any time he attempts anything like this he usually just winds up with a headache.

He pulls himself back into focus. "The question is, will they actually move into position in time? Are we leaving ourselves open to missing the opportunity to stave off an attack here?"

He picks up the time ruler and begins to study the intensity of interaction at each point of likely

intersection between incongruent elements. "We can only predict a lateral confrontation to the attack if our perp directly confronts Robl. We know he won't confront Chi, they communicate on only a superficial level, besides Chi will likely just take him out if pressed."

George walks over to the filing cabinet and opens the top drawer. "You got any food around here?"

Logic looks up and scratches his chin. "I know your not used to keeping food anywhere other than under your bed George, but let me explain something which may be handy." He folds his hands on the desk in an academic manner.

"That's a filing cabinet, not a refrigerator. Remember who's office you're in...Mine. See the plate on the front of the desk. He points to a bent brass plate glued to the desk. "Logic's office. In Logic's office you look in the refrigerator for food and the filing cabinet for files. The refrigerator is over there. You can identify it because it has one door on it, as opposed to several drawers."

He points to the small refrigerator next to the closet. It sits buried in a mound of printouts tied with rubber bands and packing string.

These printouts date all the way back to the beginning; to the point when Paul's frontal lobe is fully developed; when abstract thought is rendered.

Logic works in the conference room exclusively and has his own lab on the second floor. Regardless, he never calls the conference room anything other than "my office".

He actually puts a name plate on the door some time ago. But Emotion took it off and bent it. This happens several times, until Logic gets tired of straightening it out and putting it back on the door. He eventually just glues it to the desk where Emotion won't be able to get to it.

George is never able to figure this out, why Logic always calls the conference room "my office". But he also never cares enough to ask about it.

George comes on the scene in 1991. His first assignment back then is to live in Boston as an active observer of the incredibly fragmented facets of Paul's mind in the form of ten semi-related characters.

These characters eventually wind up fixed down, and their retainable characteristics are attributed into Emotion and Logic through the process.

Emotion and Logic proved to negate each other's effects once they settled in together, so George is sent up to the front office to keep things level, having proven to hold an effective position.

You should see the mess this place is in when George first gets here; Logic and Emotion barricading each other in separate sides of the main floor. They build a maze of old mattresses and flipped tables through the corridor to mark boundaries to the elevator and access doors in an attempt to avoid each other completely.

They never look at each other or talk directly, just send messages through the computer or have Paul running back and forth until he gets sick of it.

Back then Logic's mean streak is in full force. He spends most of his time walking around calculating Emotion's movements to block him out of rooms.

Emotion winds up sitting in the elevator pushing buttons only to find Logic waiting when the doors open.

Logic loses a lot of weight running between floors to intercept Emotion. Not much gets done around here in those days.

George grabs his drink and shuts the filing cabinet drawer. He moves back to the desk. "Oh, I forgot there was a refrigerator under that pile. You got any food in *there*?" He sits back down in the chair and lights another cigarette.

Logic makes an ignoring face and starts to position the compound protractor across the paper.

George waits for a minute, shrugs, walks over and opens the refrigerator. He picks at an oozing chicken sandwich wrapped loosely in tin foil. "How old is this?"

Logic looks up, then back down. "I don't know, at least a few days. Things haven't exactly been focused on self preservation around here. The best we can do is get some chips from the bar most of the time."

George closes the door and picks through the files dwarfing the refrigerator. He opens a file and starts

reading. "Shit, glad I wasn't around for this fray, looks like you were asleep or something."

Logic keeps marking the matrix. "Which one is that?"

George looks at the cover. Um, well if you marked them in human terms...What the hell is 120.6.B1988:S:2 supposed to mean?"

Logic blinks several times accessing his internal file which he's trained himself to arrange hierarchically according to the blocks of symbols in the string. He finds it and rubs his eyes under his glasses.

"That was a weird one and not fun. We spent the summer of 1988 in Boston after Susan slept with Dennis, lived in a tent in a Watertown back yard mostly stoned all the time."

Logic shudders. He doesn't like pot, it causes positions to shift too rapidly, and chaotic streams to be inter linked through suppositions mistaken for successive patterns.

George forgets about the file and sniffs at the chicken sandwich.

Logic slashes a set of lines quickly across the matrix. "Come over here for a minute, leave the sandwich."

George makes a pondering face at the sandwich, reluctantly puts it down and starts for the desk.

Logic holds up the matrix and uses the pencil as a pointer. "Okay, so Chi can be eliminated only in the sense he is in a standby position which is determined her at D6..."

Emotion enters the conference room after a soft knock.

Logic puts the matrix down, gathers up the notes and drawings and clutches them against his body.

"Emotion, I thought you were out on a run."

"I was out. I picked up everything and was going to watch some memory footage when I noticed the lights on, so I figured I'd see how you guys are doing." He eyes the papers under Logic's folded arms with open suspiscion.

Emotion is off glide these days as Paul has been having these bouts with paranoid psychosis. In this type of situation Emotion winds up taking on most of the weight.

Logic is usually in the position of damage control, but recent situations have defied his efforts.

George usually sits back and observes until the time comes for creative processing, usually at the end. He is essentially "the record".

George extends a hand, well more of a pointed finger, towards Emotion.

"Shit you look tired."

Emotion looks at the floor with a sputtering whimper. "I am tired, do you have any idea what I've had to deal with in the last four months? Even in his dreams Paul's trying to work out not one, but two girl problems. Every time I try to shut down I'm getting called in for dream intervention."

Logic extends a hand towards the doorway. "Well, now seems like a good opportunity for you then."

Emotion nods and starts to leave, Logic walks behind him to assure his departure. "Shut down on the couch if you don't want to be alone. Paul is in the bar, he won't be needing you for at least two or three hours. First of all, he has no desire to meet anyone for a long time, you know that. And even if he happens to go home with some girl (which at this point is as unlikely as him going home with some guy, or maybe even less likely) it still won't have anything to do with you. It will be a purely visceral experience. I say the best thing is to go shut down and hope he dreams about something new."

They leave the room together.

Logic comes back in the room and shuts the door. "Did Paul say anything about getting some drugs up here?"

George runs a calloused hand over his thinning hair. "I'm pretty sure he left them at home."

Logic shakes his head and walks back to the desk. He picks up the time ruler. "Okay, where were we...oh, okay, we eliminated Chi as a component to register against our perpetrator, except in a defensive posture during an all out confrontation. That leaves the perp, Paul and Robl as the only ones in the matrix; unless confrontation erupts."

He notices George keeps glancing in the direction of the sandwich.

"George, will you pay attention please. The sandwich won't taste, smell, or feel good."

George stops glancing in the direction of the sandwich. "If a confrontation does erupt, don't forget Bradley. Even in a position of alliance, no matter how worthless, he still strengthens L8's perspective of his position."

He hands George the pen. "Okay, so where do you suppose we fit him into the situation then?"

George takes the pen reluctantly. "Well I think we should just increase the momentum as a result of his participation. He won't actually have an effective position on his own, and most likely won't be able to take on a satellite position, being the shambling wimp he is. Of course, once the authorities and our lawyer get into the fray, the whole thing runs into a wall for them. Regardless, we both know that if anything more is thrown on our plate, Paul is going to cut out the perpetrators pucker and wear it for an earring. Bradley will run off at the first sign of violence."

Logic throws a disgusted face at George. "You're so graphic, why do you have to be so graphic?"

George smiles and puts the pen down. "For all practical purposes Logic, I'm creativity, and we both know this is how the process has shaped over the years." He turns around and directs his attention back to the sandwich. "So do we have this worked out yet?"

"Not yet." Logic grabs the calculator and starts to scribble out notes indicating force of action, taking into account loss of force as a result of resistance angle (contrary information in relation to proposed validity) and time.

"It looks here like increased time, if the situation is not confronted, will actually increase the perpetrator's subjective position as a result of isolated communication with others who share his perspective. But only to a certain point until the momentum deteriorates; when they move on to focus on a different subject and this one takes a background position." He puts down the calculator and sits back studying his notes. "There appears to be a high probability the momentum will peak, then diminish

considerably. That may be a dangerous hitch, as it occurs here at the point where it becomes evident to him there is no resolution in his favor." He leans forward and runs his finger caressingly down the perpetrator's *initial recognition* line, which generates at L8. "See here? The momentum is refreshed before the hump is reached, this could be as a result of contact with Paul. And we both know Paul will pull through a full on confrontation if he intuits the situation and acts without consulting us. Both of which are likely."

George sits down, he makes a pondering consequences face. "If he has and does we need to act quickly because he's in no condition to deal with this gracefully."

"Agreed." Logic pulls a protractor with hinged and indexed arms from the drawer. This is the *compound protractor*.

It essentially measures angle in relative terms. It accounts for breadth of motion and to a lesser extent the effects of force of motion. He lays it on the matrix and starts to mark points in pencil.

"Okay, here's the pocket of manipulation, it resides centered... huh, well there appear to be two. One would be advantageous over the next, as the second requires an all out confrontation between involved parties."

"So what's the first?" George lights another cigarette.

"Well, a lag exists between what L8 expects in relation the authorities and the actual angle of force in the potential of their position, once the lawyer is involved. That mistake on L8's part veers his course of action away from his actual position. The assumption creates a weak point giving us a slight advantage. Maybe we should actually consider approaching him from the realistic angle first. Save on the legal fees."

George looks surprised. "You know that won't work, Paul's just going to wind up killing him."

Logic pulls the compound protractor from the paper and closes the arms. "I did a side calculation and would be surprised if Paul hasn't already intuited the situation out. We'd better contact him before he acts without consulting us first."

George gets up with a groan. "Okay, I'll send it out direct; avoid pulling Emotion in on all levels."

He walks over to the computer and starts typing. The green glow of the monitor marks shadows into the lines of his weathered face.

6.20.98 / 1.09 am

direct transmission / Paul

contact George or Logic before you retire>
re: possible conflict of which you are most likely aware>

out>

He turns off the monitor and walks back over to the table.

"Okay, at least now we know he'll contact us before running out and slicing anyone up. Or we can hope he will, even if only because he knows we're aware of the situation. The biggest mistake he can make right now though is to divulge any information to anyone, other than Robl of course."

The phone rings and George flips on the speaker. "Hey bud, when are you coming back, I'm hungry."

Paul comes on, bar noises in the background. "I hope that's not why you had me contact you. I'm trying to avoid another episode in public. I'm aware of the situation and I'll discuss the matter with Robl when we get home. Now, if there isn't anything else..."

Logic walks over to the speaker looking at the matrix sheet now marked up and tattered from being erased on over and over. "Well, I'm assuming you know the position of all parties involved, I'll send up the tangent points when the time comes. Don't try to intuit this whole thing out, there are several nuances which need to be discussed."

Paul waits out the crack of pool balls. "Okay, look I'm in the bar and was peacefully staring into space, the first

rest I've had in a while. I'm not sure Emotion's grabbed this yet so be ready. Now unless there's anything else, I'll send you a transmission after I talk to Robl. You going to be up there for a while?"

Logic leans closer to the speaker. "Where are we going to go? Unless you wrote in a front door we don't know about. And get us some real food for a change, I'm sick of those 7-11 burritos."

George nods at the speaker. "Actually I like the 7-11 burritos."

"Goodbye boys, I'll see what I can do. Out." Paul hangs up the phone.

Logic makes a worried face. "He's going to fuck up, I know he is. Why do I even bother. Emotion just winds up getting a hold of it regardless and all of my calculations are out the window." He throws an abrupt fluttering hand at the window, but stops mid-gesture realizing nothing goes out the window.

George wags a pondering finger. "Maybe if we got Emotion in here, and actually got him in on the process..."

He notices Logic is making an offended face. "Just kidding, lighten up Logic."

Logic picks up another chart and shakes his head. "How am I expected to work on anything with that freak sitting in my office worrying over nonsense?"

"Okay, okay, I said I was kidding, don't you think I know that."

Logic places the paper on the desk. "Can we get back to this, it's going to need a 3D model and I'm sure you're not going to stick around here all night."

George puts his finger away. "Well, that depends on Paul. I think he's out of ether, but if he gets some, you're going to be locked down, Emotion will be sweetly immobilized, and I'm left to negotiate the tilting halls." He makes a staggering motion in his swivel chair.

Logic lights another cigarette and puts it in the ash tray next to the one he was still smoking. "When did the whole ether thing come out anyway? Why the hell did he want to start getting into that stuff? You know, he really does make strange choices sometimes."

George makes a surprised face. "Wow! No Logic, I didn't know about Paul's strange choice problems. In fact, it's such an isolated incident (the Paul making strange choices part) that I'm surprised you don't remember. It was that one night after hanging out piss drunk at the bar with Robl and Cal. They all took a bunch of that fine gel acid and snorted up a forty paper."

Logic raises an accusatory finger. "Our forty paper."

George nods. "Anyway, ether seemed to be the right choice to balance out the evening. If there's one thing Paul can spare it's a little neural efficacy. He relies on you a little too much Logic, how often do you even leave this room? When was the last time you were in the lab working on your own stuff?"

Logic is obviously getting upset. Mostly because he knows George has a point, but also because he doesn't like it when George has a point. "Can we get back to the matrix? Until we get some sort of input from Robl we aren't going to be able to work up a confirmed 3D model. But we should be able to get it started based on what we assume his position to be, leaving room for possible deviation."

George sips at his now empty gin and tonic. "Do we have enough gin left? We need to have enough gin, don't you think?"

Logic ignores this, he makes a thinking face. "So the real question is, are there any elaborative systems which we may have forgotten." His eyes dart and sputter. "Yes, the rest of the people who know both of them, they limit the force and breadth of action on the part of L8 if they remain neutral, or offer opinions incongruent with his." He marks deliberately across the paper, slowly dragging out the words. "Also to our advantage is that people for the most part don't take L8 seriously. At least no one we care about."

The computer starts to beep

George gets up and walks over to the screen. "There's a direct coming in from Paul."

6.20.98 / 1.50 am

direct transmission/George/Logic

left bar at 1.32 am>
have made contact with Robl>
will report when I return>

out>

As George is about to turn off the monitor, another transmission comes in:

direct transmission/George/Logic

hallucinations are moderate>
anxiety over request to key suspect to return materials>
will she see it as a violation
or simply the need to recoup materials>
has she realized that our whole negative interaction was
small in comparison to the rest of our time together?>
or is she still holding on to negativity>

out>

George makes a strained face. "Jees, how long is he planning to dwell on this."

Logic shrugs. "At this point George, this is your territory. Why isn't he painting?"

George shakes his head. "Well for one thing, he doesn't have anywhere to set up a studio, and we also know it's your attempts to find some sort of practical hold on the whole situation which causes him to keep coming back to it. Emotion lost out a long time ago, we're lucky to be alive. I'm trying to help as much as is possible but we don't have the focus, or the resources."

Logic shakes his head. "Regardless, I'm tired of dealing with this, there's a real crisis at hand and Nicole was just a diversion. He should have gotten out and let her

move to Santa Fe. It would have at least have been a clean ending instead of this bizarre episode."

He picks up the phone "Logic. Paul, voice direct." He waits, tapping the desk in perfect rhythm.

"Paul, are you awake?"

A drunken mumble comes across the receiver.

"Well obviously you are *now*. Can you get up here? You were supposed to see us before passing out."

George starts shifting in his chair. "Did he get any food?"

Logic nods and waves his hand at George to be quiet. "Good then, and bring the dirtbag something to eat."

George sips at his drink. "Did he get any food?"

Logic sets the receiver into it's cradle and is once again engrossed in the scattered Nicole matrix on the desk.

George bends to look Logic in the face, trying to pull his attention from the pile of pegs. "Hellooo Logic, did he say if he had any food?"

part 3

A knock on the door, Emotion comes in. "Why are you guys still here?"

George looks at Logic slyly and turns to Emotion. "It's Paul, he's been having more of those dreams where he keeps drawing up formulas to resolve the Nicole matrix. Luckily he woke up or Logic would have had to head down to the dream room, and you know how much he loves that."

Logic looks impressed with George's quick response.

Emotion makes an abrupt gesture. "Well, at least he hasn't been having more of those dreams where they're happily hanging out, I hate dealing with that stuff in the morning. It's like they were together again, and then he wakes up and realizes she would probably hang up or yell if

he called her." He leans on the wall and looks at his fingernails.

Logic pours himself a fresh drink. "Try being *me* after one of those dreams. The idiot sit's around all day failing to understand why he can't actually call her, and I sit here trying to remind him that it's because she's crazy. Which of course hardly works."

George walks over to Emotion and tugs at the sleeve of his bathrobe.

"You're exhausted buddy, have you looked in a mirror lately? It doesn't help any of us to have you fucked up all day. Do everyone a favor and go to bed, shut down for a while. You've been plowing through those notes for hours."

Emotion straightens up and points a limp accusatory hand at Logic. "Well if that bitch asshole stops writing all over my notes I won't have to sit around all day crossing out his wrong parts." He slumps back against the wall. "I'm going to bed, I don't even...I'm too tired for this."

The door opens with a slow and even swing. Paul staggers in, also with a slow and even swing.

George sniffs at Paul and throws him a puzzled face. "You were doing ether?"

Paul leans on the wall obviously trying to recapture an element of lost grace. "No George, I think you'd know. We were going to but the can was empty, I just dripped some on my shirt trying to dribble what was left out of the spent can." He throws a glance at Logic. "Emotion I'm surprised you're still here."

Logic turns on Emotion with an awkward jerk. "He was just leaving, we told him about your dream about trying to figure out the Nicole matrix again." He hits Paul with a play along face.

Paul attempts to separate himself from the wall. "Good night Emotion."

"Good night Paul. Listen, just so I know, are you planning to be in close proximity to her any time tomorrow?"

"I hope not, now go to bed."

Emotion nods. "Okay, good night guys." He leaves.

Paul heads for a chair and slumps down with a huff. "I'm getting sick of that simpering prick."

The other two walk over and stand there staring at Paul. He throws his head up in drunken irritation. "What."

George shakes his head and lets off a heavy exhale, smoke billows over Paul. "You know *what*. Were tired of having to deal with this Nicole crap. There are important things going on Paul, and she obviously can't handle seeing you. So can we forget about it already?" He motions around the room. "None of us understand it no matter how hard we try Paul. A smart person, (which of course, being that you may or may not have effected permanent brain damage at this point, you may no longer be), would have figured out the best thing to do is to stop trying."

Paul makes a puzzled face. "I'm through trying to understand it." He points at Logic accusingly. "Did you try talking to him about this? About the trying to understand it part?"

Logic bristles. "You know, I'm sick of getting blamed for everything around here. Take some responsibility for your own actions."

Paul flips his hand down residedly. "Well, you're the one who keeps sending me out to find more non-existent information. I just want to somehow resolve this so we can move on. You know as well as I do it's completely ridiculous to be hung up on her, but for some reason we are. We can stare blankly at what we've figured out about her inconsistencies, lies, obvious past history and on, but it still hangs there. We also all realize the lingering risk factor."

Logic walks over to the desk and lights a cigarette. "Yes all is noted, she tapped into our core. Her approach is so erratic there is no code to grasp. Barring some sort of complete renegotiation of time, which we know of course is impossible, she isn't going to communicate at all with us. George has been right all along, get rid of the cunt; there's nothing to understand with this one."

He winces and starts pushing the pile of pegs from the Nicole matrix into a box. Logic doesn't have the capacity

to be upset over Nicole directly. But over the cascade of pegs tumbling into the box, yes.

Logic has been kept from satisfying his essential process.

"This is the only possibility, we should have done this the first time she wouldn't let you drop her off in front of her work, even though you woke up at 5.30 am to do so. What an insult. She was hiding something, and most likely it was ugly."

Paul stands abruptly, steadies himself and starts pacing drunkenly. He stops to grasp the conference table for support.

"The problem is, we have figured this out, I don't understand why the fuck it keeps nagging at us. It's obvious that she..."

George cuts in. "Can we stop fucking talking about her for just a minute, what did Robl say?"

Paul leans one elbow on the table, it slides out taking the rest of him to the floor. He pulls himself back up and makes an I meant to do that face. "Well, Robl said she's obviously a slut so the best we can hope for is I didn't catch any diseases."

George throws back a sharp stare and takes a deep breath. He speaks in slow intentional tones. "No, what I mean is what did Robl say about the important problem, we may need to deal with the authorities, remember?"

"Oh." Paul starts pacing again. "He said exactly what we thought he would. He thinks the allegations are absurd and the moron doesn't have his head on straight. Robl is agitated and would be dangerous if he wasn't going out of town. Basically, we decided to call the lawyer just in case. But he figures it will likely just blow over."

"Of course..." Paul grabs a glass and walks over to the sink for some water. "I think if there's one thing we seem to have figured out, it's that forethought is key."

He steadies the glass of water with both hands. "Do you guys need me any more from me? I have a meeting tomorrow and I need to write a report before I go to bed." He sips the water and pours the rest out. "Why do I hate water? I mean, it's the essence of life or something, right?"

Logic opens the door and motions for Paul to leave, realizing an intelligent conversation is impossible. "Are you still working on that neuro text?"

George gets up and crushes his cigarette into the ashtray. "Never mind the research, what's in the bag, dad."

Paul slips the bag to Logic. "I almost forgot, 7-11 burritos. Good night boys, and yes to the neuro thing." He leaves and Logic shuts the door.

George walks over to the bag, and by default, Logic. "What did he get?"

Logic doesn't answer, his eyes are darting in angular sharp passes. He's either working through multiple access point calculation, or on a lot of cocaine.

George grabs the bag and pulls a 7-11 burrito out. "Chicken, he even remembered to steal some of the nacho cheese stuff. Huh, you know, sometimes he does actually listen. Too bad he's such a schmuck the rest of the time. You want one?"

Logic doesn't want one, he walks over to the desk and mashes his cigarette into the ashtray.

"I can't get any of the nodes to meet up. After the base code runs through, none of the legs resolve, they just float there at eccentric angles as if the base code is inherently faulty. I've never seen anything like this before. How am I supposed to figure it out; the Nicole thing."

George's words are thick with burrito: "That's the point you moron, you can't figure it out. She's a game player. Forget about it already. Stop being such a mongoloid, lighten up. At least we didn't waste that much time on her." He takes another bite, drips the red and yellow sauce down his encrusted shirt, dips the sauce with his finger and smears it on the burrito.

Paul never bothers to give George manners from the beginning. Why waste the energy he figures. Manners aren't integral to his prime function, in fact, the lack of manners appear to potentiate his effect.

George takes another bite. "You were getting sick of having to work overtime to figure out her problems anyway. She used you, all I got out of it was a new painting

project, though that seems to have been lost on Paul. If anyone should be happy it's over it should be you. All Emotion got was kicked in the head. The only positive effect is Paul started writing again. Good thing too I was getting bored slumping around in half stasis. Of course he also had some of the best sex ever, but so did everyone else, and now we have that problem."

Logic looks at George with fresh intent. "Fuck your crass." His head slowly tilts to the left and releases.

This usually means he's renegotiated a prior conclusion. "But your right. That's one thing I like about you George, you're blunt. I don't think you ever met your predecessor Fuzzy did you?"

George shakes his head no, and squeezes the packet of hot sauce all over his arm. He wipes most of it off with the burrito.

Logic ignores this. "Well, he was a weird one, I don't really know where Paul got him, but we were essentially left up here blunted by THC delta 9..."

George cuts in. "You mean pot?"

Logic tries to make an ignoring face. "Yes George. Anyway, we were blunted while Fuzzy ran around trying to figure out what herb or scented oil was going to fix the life, never really consulting either of us. Granted, we were going through the Susan episode, but this guy couldn't even figure out how to work with us. What a loser."

George smiles. "Well, it seems like you may be holding on to some of that a little too long there Logic."

He slurps burrito run off from the bottom of the wrapper. "You sure you don't want one?"

Logic ignores him.

"Suit yourself." He throws the bag into the huge festering pile of garbage in the corner of the room. "Shit, why don't you clean this place up a little?"

Logic looks at George: The crusted stains all over the shirt he hasn't taken off in a week, and who knows the last time he actually bathed. "Well, coming from you this statement no doubt has a high level of impact. Really makes me re-think how I conduct things here in my office." He tries to smile. "In fact, I feel an explanation is in

order." He motions to the desk. "Basically George, I have enough to do around here already, and I don't really care what goes on over in that corner when I'm over here *all* the way on the other side of the room most of the time. My desk is here and the pile of garbage is there. No problem."

George walks over shaking his head. He should talk, when Paul wrote him into that weekly rented room down under the Mass Pike in South Boston, all he had was a metal bed and a pile of wet clothes. The walls were stained and cracked, the whole place stunk. Actually, it's not too different from how he lives now. "What a way to live, or something." He is speaks without realizing.

Logic looks up. "What?"

"Oh, um nothing, just thinking about that winter in Boston."

Logic takes off his glasses, he sits back and rubs his eyes. "Paul really gave you some heavy origins. I always wondered how you would come through it, but it seemed to give you what you needed to work through your position in Paul's system."

George notices Logic's eyes are so much smaller than they look through his thick glasses. "You mean his life?"

Logic puts his glasses back on. "Yes, of course that's what I mean, let's not get into semantics okay? Don't listen to how I'm saying it instead of what I'm saying."

George pulls out his tobacco and starts to roll a cigarette. "Um, sure. So have we worked this out yet? I figure the best way we can approach it is to see how it works out with Robl first and then take a more aggressive approach through the lawyer if necessary. No need to take into consideration how our perp will react, he has no real position anyway."

Logic walks over to the closet and pulls out a box of hardware. "We still need to build the model. There are other social factors which the lawyer has no pull against."

The box contains the elements needed to build a 3D model of a situation matrix.

It includes the basic structural components in ten different colors.

Each leg has a track to accept sliding markers and is marked with holes along the body. The holes accommodate multicolored pegs with indexed pivoting junction spools.

The multi-colored pegs serve to differentiate positions within the legs and indicate assimilated factors.

The colors can either correspond to other legs in the situation or outside elements which have been designated as such.

Each indexed spool at the end of either side of the leg is etched with numbers at regular intervals designated to correspond to a list created by the individual building the matrix (Logic).

The numbers represent the final calculation of force and angle of each element of the situation, which is represented by each leg, designated by a corresponding color code.

Each leg is retractable, using three indexed sliders to form the body.

Time is designated by the length of the leg in relation to the pivot points at each joint. This also winds up representing the angle of motion, based on degradation of the element as a result of motion in relation to time.

The holes in each leg are also set up to accommodate flexible nodes; positioned to represent breadth of motion through the circumstance in question.

The whole model is set up on a base, a free moving dome which accomidates the indexed legs which can be inserted into multiple positions; designated to represent past events as generation points.

The model can then reflect the effect of past circumstances, and how they have been dealt with by the individuals throughout the situation represented by the matrix.

The model is as much a visual tool as a calculating device. It allows the individuals to see the components of a situation and how they interact so they can take into account every possible angle.

In the Nicole situation, there is not enough concrete information construct a 3D matrix. This is the only thing which continues to lock Logic in.

George starts opening drawers on the desk. "Do you have any bourbon?"

Logic continues to lay out the structural components on the table, consulting his pile of notes for each one. "Top left hand drawer."

George pulls a bottle from the drawer, he holds it up in a parody of triumph. "Well that's excellent, Knob Creek, you want any?" He pours a generous shot into his dirty glass.

Logic doesn't look up. "No."

The computer starts to beep again.

The computer is a centralized mainframe system. It takes in information from the sensory systems, compares the input to existing file information and loads the composite into folders based on relevance to each specific individual, indexing the comparative information for reference.

Paul is the only one of the four who gets all information automatically. All have access to the full run though, except for dream files which is only available to any of them, including Paul, on a limited level.

For the most part they each stick to what they're directly involved in. The individuals do wind up checking into other files on a continual basis, except for Emotion who has a hard time with the filing system, and is mostly distracted by his own problems anyway.

The computer is essentially passive, though it *is* fully integrated on a communicative level, being the prime mode of transfer, and bases it's calculations on information provided by the individuals balanced against all sensory input.

There is a calculating override system which can be initialized in certain situations; activating an emergency lock out algorithm. But even that system only functions on a suggestive level.

There are really very few systems under the control of the computer, mostly the support and routing systems. It does have full control over the dreaming systems though. In this system the computer overrides the authority of every individual, even Paul.

There was a time when systems such as the lock out functioned flawlessly, giving the computer a higher level of control.

But the data has been corrupted over years of relentless abuse, and this in turn has eroded the computer's independent function in all but the dream systems.

Other than having complete control over the support and dream systems, the computer is primarily a tool for monitoring information, filtering it down, indexing and filing it, and routing it to the appropriate individual.

The system routes information by sending instantaneous messages either through the cracked, virtually inaudible speakers embedded in the drop ceilings, or by sending text files to be intercepted at terminals.

There are four types of messages:

direct transmissions: from one individual to another (These used to be open transmissions, the assumption being that individuals wouldn't read each other's mail. That hardly worked.)

general transmissions: from one individual to all receiving

direct system messages: from sensory or monitoring systems to an individual

general system messages: from sensory or monitoring systems to all receiving

Logic flips on the monitor, he looks at the header.
"George, you have a direct."

George walks over and hits his access key:

6.20.98 / 4.30 am

direct system message/George:

dream warrants intervention>

out>

part 4

George heads for the door. "Gotta go, needed in the dream room." He leaves and walks over to the elevator.

The computer knows where to send the elevator based on the system message. But only because the individual pushes the button with his respective name on it.

Either way, individuals riding need to push a button. So it's really not much of an automatic system.

This system makes no sense to Logic, so regardless of whether or not he's going somewhere in the building based on a system directive he takes the stairs.

Although he does this mostly in protest to the absence of true definition of the system, this is basically the only exercise he subjects himself to so I'm glad for this, imagine the mess we'd be in if he were to atrophy.

The elevator doors open and George walks down the dank, once white hallway. Asbestos muffled pipes, useless doors and empty closets. At the end of the hall, a dented steel door painted ten times over.

He turns the silent knob and the door creaks out. Soft light peeks through and challenges the corridor's dim incandescents. He slips in and pulls the door shut.

The dream room is completely contained and is as separate as possible from the rest of the building.

The computer even has a separate dream cache which is inaccessible to the individuals, regardless of the individual's involvement in the dream.

The computer monitors all dream activity, but only distributes small amounts of seemingly random information to the rest of the center.

The remaining information is purged and marked as priority disk space to be written over at the beginning of each day.

Individuals first enter the *safe room*. This is a white room with a blue glow and soft smoked mirrors lining each wall. White suits complete with helmets, gloves, and soft antistatic booties hang on the wall; custom fit for each individual.

The helmets allow no direct visual contact with the environment surrounding the individual. They instead have a full 360° active matrix high density screen which displays the dream environment.

The helmets are fitted with a direct intercom link to the central computer, which activates if the individual pushes a momentary contact switch embedded in the tip of his glove.

The switch is connected to a relay which diverts the input from the microphone embedded in the helmet from being audible in the dream, and sends it to the general voice system. This allows the individual to direct the computer, or communicate with another individual without contaminating the dream.

Paul's suit is the only one which isn't equipped with an intercom connection to the central terminal. In fact, he doesn't even know this type of link exists.

Each helmet is also lined with a series of *cortical limiters*. These are inducting coils which are activated and de-activated in the "prep room".

The cortical limiters serve the function of separating the individuals experience in the dream room from waking reality. They essentially set up a series of sympathetic magnetic pulses which shift the currently active electro-

magnetic patterns of the cerebral cortex to a different amplitude, without actually effecting function in any way.

This is similar to striking a magnet, which knocks the electrons out of alignment; de-magnetizing the material.

The desired effect of this shift is to remove the individual from the present state (waking or dream), in order to place him into the new state. Once the dream state is terminated, the amplitude is shifted back, which has the same effect.

The cortical limiter is essentially the separation between dream and reality. The individual has a vague memory of the dream, but it is registered at a different overall amplitude, and so is effectively diverted from short term memory.

Each suit is vacuum fit once on and is lined with micro-thin hydraulic nodules, fitted with variable thermocouplings.

These nodules create pressure and temperature variations where indicated.

The individual is locked out of everything except for what the suit is telling him is going on.

The nodule housings are connected individually to a flexible structure lining the whole suit.

The lining is connected to an external guidance system which terminates to a complex series of crane and pulley systems.

This allows the individual to be guided into place remotely by the computer, to a designated starting position in the dream environment.

The nodules are also linked to each other via segmented strips which lock together when magnetized. This allows rigidity to be simulated in case a structure such as a wall or chair is indicated in the dream content.

In the case of an individual entering a dream in progress, this is extremely necessary. It eliminates the confusion of a possible random element like an individual entering through the door and standing in mid air, or walking through a wall.

The door into the dream room is lined with a muffling material, no sound goes in or out.

The door is locked by the computer. No one in the center has access or can be granted access if they are not directly involved in the dream, regardless of their alternate clearance level.

There is no knob, only a magnetic latch inside the door. This is the only high security area, even Paul can not gain indirect access. In fact, he has no idea how.

George puts the suit on and activates the remote computer. The suit shrinks to fit directly and the screen is activated.

A briefing flashes across the screen:

6.20.98 / 4.35 am

direct system message/George:

dream in progress>

you will be remotely directed for 15 seconds>

or until oriented>

content:

Paul is in Broadway sector; all night bar/restaurant next to

"Chock Full 'O' Nuts" sitting at table in right rear of front section>

he will leave bar and suddenly be in small red convertible auto driving along coastline towards mall complex 7 waking minutes from on ramp>

he is going to pick up Nicole; they are to take a drive along the coast and discuss creative project>

you are to be placed next to him suddenly and are to divert him from picking her up>

your suggested point of diversion is through different creative project>

he may be diverted by offering a more relevant and exciting project

an environment which combines extreme heights and groups of affectionate women is indicated>

although the environment will be activated to your specifications>

Emotion has been placed on alert just in case Paul can not be diverted>

Logic is also being updated through direct system messages>

placement in one minute>

please move through the door>

out>

The "mall complex" is part of the regular landscape of Paul's dreams.

For 7 years Paul unconsciously constructs an elaborate compound in which most of his dreams take place.

While Paul is of course conscious of the complex, he is unaware there is a buried file which contains it's specifications.

The idea to save the landscape to disk comes down as a collaborative idea between Logic and George.

George brings the idea up at one of the first "restructuring" meetings:

"The poor bastard needs some level of consistency, why not in an environment of our own creation. Seems it would make our job easier to not have to wait out intervention in a completely random environment."

Logic likes the idea immediately. "Basically, all we have to do is save the environments to disk, selectively of course, and create a standardized algorithm to run at the beginning of each sequence. This would essentially place him in the appropriate environment relative to the content of the dream."

This meeting lasts for almost ten weeks.

Emotion never grasps the importance and so winds up completely eliminated from the process. He doesn't really care anyway at that point; too occupied with the whole Kathryn scenario.

When new environments are indicated the structure is added to. The decision to add a new area proceeds a final matrix based test.

This finds Logic lingering for weeks over possible outcomes of proposed scenarios in the environment. There are many random elements which can occur in a dream, so the matrices are incredibly complex.

They're not usually in a position to have this level of control over Paul's environment, all they're left to worry about is how he interacts with the circumstances.

The dream compound sits on a breaking coast line. A winding road moves along cliffs which drop to a sand covered beach and clear blue ocean, like the one Paul camped over back in 1986.

At a junction point in the road, the "mall complex" sits on an extended hill. The interior of soft lights and

perfectly arranged department stores is supplemented with huge atriums and overstated ice cream stands at each wing.

A pier juts off from the left flank of the mall and defies physical reality as the boardwalk terminates 4' over the water. The boardwalk starts off with multi-level seafood restaurants and clown games, but degrades into an empty slender pair as it extends to the water.

To the north of the mall is a loose cluster of densely connected streets in the tone of an extracted cityscape.

One street is called "Broadway", basically two city blocks which house a series of restaurants, stores and bars, all drawn from the New York of Paul's childhood. Most of the uneventful sitting around type dreams and long walks looking in shop windows with grandma are set here.

Broadway terminates into a curved road with several intersecting alleyways, this is "China Town", similar atmosphere to Broadway but different enough to be singular.

Fantastic Chinese restaurants, a small bar with blue lights and dark wooden tables which spill on to the sidewalk. Most of the elicit activity goes on in China Town.

Wild sex clubs and indoor pools hidden under innocuous basements. Perfectly nude women stand in doorways, precious queers in pink and yellow boas tell jokes over chow mien.

China Town has two other access points. One is a long deserted minor highway lined with small hotels and dilapidated houses. This stretches indefinitely and is rarely accessed.

The other point of entry is a residential hill with cobblestone streets. Nothing ever takes place in this sector, it's mostly there for to flavor the transition between the sectors it connects.

The most recent addition is what is known as "Silicon Valley". This consists of two sparsely populated streets along the ocean beach. Large outlet stores and small brick bunkers for the workers.

At the southern tip of Silicon Valley is a huge girder structure which stretches several miles up and over, similar to the type of crane structures used to load boats, only much bigger and with an ambiguous function.

George moves toward the door, it opens with a soft pop. "I wonder how the request for a creative project came down. Well, that's certainly not going to work, I think a more aggressive approach is indicated. Emotion's going to hate me for doing this, but he'd have a hell of a lot more work if the dream goes through it's current pattern."

George is prepared for entrance into the dream room in a small sealed cubicle called the "prep room". The door automatically locks shut as soon as he enters.

The soft coils connected to the nodules in the suit are initially controlled by remote arms in the ceiling of the dream room, facilitating exact placement in the constructed environment.

These coils are attached at each joint and termination point on the body. They allow the individual to experience flying, falling, or floating.

A red light flashes inside the helmet and the cortical limiter is activated. Once George has been separated from his previous state, and reactivated in the dream environment, the briefing again flashes across the screen.

The door to the dream room opens. George is lifted by the coils and placed in the seated position next to Paul.

They are both in the "determination state" this is the point between dream sequences. The individual is in total isolation; feeling nothing, no sense of time or space. This state is achieved by activating a stream of smooth, regular pulses via the cortical limiters. The pulses are based on the amplitude of cortical activation at the moment before the individual is placed in the determination state. This is basically the NREM (Non-REM) state which occurs between dreams.

They could be there for hours awaiting placement with no sense of time, frozen in the moment.

Paul is re-activated first and is driving the red two seater down the twisted road, he thinks of little other than the feel of the smooth wheel in his hands, and the monkey riding on the hood like a rodeo cowboy.

About a minute later George appears on the scene seated next to Paul. "Hey there buddy, where we going?"

Paul looks over, he makes a surprised face. "George, huh, you're going to have to get out when I pick up Nicole. There's no room, and we want to be alone anyway."

George pulls an already lit cigarette from his shirt pocket and pops it into his mouth.

"There's way more pressing business buddy. Peanut Hand's sitting on top of one of the girders in Silicon Valley."

Peanut Hand is Paul's cat which he has for eight years. About five months ago his world collapses when he finds her crushed screaming and dying, run over by a car.

This is the heaviest trauma ever worked into Paul's relatively traumatic existence. For years Peanut is his only tie to the world of healthy feelings. He never recovers, imagine the impasse of the creature which has been your child, dying screaming and bleeding in your arms.

"She's alive?!" Paul is hooked.

George motions towards the next exit with his cigarette. "Yup, we should take this turn off. Nicole's a cunt pal, let her stand there. The real love is waiting for you to get her down from the girder."

Paul takes the exit without any argument, the monkey evaporates with a fading whine. The car speeds down the ramp and into Silicon Valley.

A transmission is flashing across the right corner of George's visual field:

6.20.98 / 4.58 am

direct transmission/George:

you bastard fuck>

you knew I was going to have to deal with this>

suck my pucker you god damn bastard fuck>

bitch>

-Emotion

you bastard bitch suck bastard sick fucking>

out>

George grimaces, he can't be bothered right now. Best to just explain it away in the morning, it's obvious Emotion's lost the ability to form sentences anyway.

He turns on the intercom link to the computer and structures the scene.

The car zips across the flat road, rapidly approaching the girder structure.

Suddenly the car disappears and both individuals are lifted five miles into the air, or at least they feel as if they are.

The computer calculates the velocity and distance of the real lift and compensates for unattainable distance as a result of the contained dream room by increasing velocity. The simulation is very real indeed.

At the top of the girder is a small party. Peanut Hand is sitting at the edge, she rubs the top of her head on Paul's shaking hand when he reaches her. Paul grabs her tightly and kisses her laughing.

Four women in different states of undress are making the guys some sort of luminescent fish bowl drinks, they rub the guys shoulders and whisper into their ears without moving their lips at all: "Heaven, is exactly like where you are right now, only much, much, better."

As is usually the case with this type of dream, something wakes Paul up. Both individuals are instantly placed back into a dead stasis. Paul falls back to sleep and is in another dream sequence.

George is immediately re-integrated. He walks out of the prep room and takes off the suit. A direct system message is waiting for him; a debriefing.

6.20.98 / 4.58 am

direct system message/George:

dream information to be retained:

setting: Silicon Valley girder structures>

content: Party at top of girders, luminescent drinks>

participants: Paul, Peanut Hand, Four women>

specifics: "Heaven, is exactly like where you are right now, only much, much, better.">

out.

The dream debriefings rely on the elaborative process to fill in contextual gaps.

The elaborative process is essentially the link between points of information; through contextual information being related to similar content connected to other entities. This process winds up building a tree of information based on relational links.

The elaborative process can be explained in this way:

"Leaf" links to "tree" and also links to "green", which links to the green shirt your ex gave you, which links to the time you found out she cheated on you, which links to the time you cheated on her, which links to the girl you cheated on her with, which links to the bar you met the girl in, which links to the first time you were in the bar, which links to loosing your wallet that night, which links to when your uncle gave you the wallet, which links to the day you visited your uncle in the hospital, which links to the time you were in the coffee shop in the same hospital, which is when you met your ex, which links to the time you found out she cheated on you, and on.

George heads out of the safe room and into the elevator. He pushes the button for the main floor.

The doors open to reveal Emotion waiting in the front office, he's sweating and maintains a deep red coloration. He shakes his head spastically when George enters the room. "Damn bitch suck!" He stares intensely at the floor with fists clenched.

George throws his arms up in an exaggerated shrug. "Look, you know where he was heading, don't you realize it would have meant more work for you in the end?" He takes a slow breath, realizing a soft tactic is indicated. "Hey, I'm sorry buddy. But you know as well as I do that we need to get over Nicole. And having dreams about having happy times with her is only going to keep the bond active. And if that continues, we'll never get out of this mess."

Emotion starts crying. "Is that all you think about? Lightening the work load? I don't care about that stupid bitch. I finally had a little break from Peanut and now you went and made her memory active again."

George rubs his hand over his forehead. "Oh shit, hey buddy look, I'm sorry. I guess I wasn't figuring on you getting so caught up in this, we've had these dreams before and you do get upset for a little while, but then it's all okay." He puts a hand on Emotion's shoulder.

Logic opens the door to the conference room. "George, will you come in here for a minute."

"Sure Logic." George removes his hand from Emotion and heads into the office. He shuts the door gently. "Poor guy's hysterical."

Logic walks over to the desk and starts to chop a line of cocaine. "What's he so upset about?"

"We had another Peanut Hand dream. Didn't you get a direct?"

"I don't get directs on dreams involving Peanut Hand, they just go to file and I don't bother reading them. It isn't exactly my department, it all worked out cleanly for me. She got run over and she died. Nothing to figure out."

George walks over to the desk. "I guess not." He eyes the cocaine. "Hey, when did that come down?"

"About two hours ago, I figured I'd save it until you were done."

George knows he's lying about waiting. He'd know even if Logic didn't have a white Hitler mustache stemming from both nostrils. "Um, thanks. Is there any whiskey left?" He wipes a glass out with his shirt in anticipation.

"Yeah, over there." Logic motions over to the 3D matrix sitting on the table, it's almost fully constructed.

"Wow, you've really been working on this." George pours the last of the whiskey into his glass and leans on the table.

Logic separates the lines out. "Yeah, we're almost done, just a couple of variables to go."

"Oh, I was talking about the whiskey. But good job with the matrix too of course." He walks over and flops into a chair across from Logic. "Is there any more?"

Logic looks at him briefly and goes back to separating the perfectly semetrical lines. "Of course there's more, where would we be if you weren't able to maintain your drunken slob status. The Johnny Walker Black Emotion picked up in the beginning of all this is in the bottom drawer of my desk."

He slides the mirror across the desk and hands the glass tube to George. "Here you go, take your pick."

George takes the tube. He ponders the soft lines and takes a slow draw. "Jees, hits you right in the back of the eyes."

The computer beeps and Logic walks over. He reads the general system message. "Shit." His voice is matter of fact. "That idiot, doesn't he even bother consult us anymore?"

He slowly walks over to George and takes the tube.

George watches him pull the line. "So are you going to tell me what it says, or should I throw out guesses and you can do an interperative dance to fill out the specifics."

Logic takes a draw. "Just read it, I'm too tired for your dancing game."

George walks over to the monitor and bends down, he hesitantly taps the "read general" key and reads the message.

6.20.98 / 5.58 am

general system message:

notice:

Paul has blocked all communications>

re: written communication to be sent out to Nicole before 11 am today>

facsimile of communication:

ok.

Turned on the light at 1.45 am on Wednesday:

I will send this regardless of what it is in the morning because

At this moment I am honest instead

So I might as well:

Thinking about how we don't know each other any more instead

When we think of each other it is only sour suddenly

Kind of weird don't you think?

out>

George flips off the monitor and walks over to the table. He sips at his whiskey mumbling. "Well, he's an

idiot, but we can't do anything about it, and it's not like we didn't know about it already, the idiot part."

Logic puts down the tube. "Yeah, well at least it's not like it's a letter requesting something. It's more like a statement on the absurdity of the situation. But a pointless waste of time and paper anyway."

George walks over to the refrigerator. "Well, he's been wasting energy on this for over two months. I guess a few more days while he waits for the reply he won't get isn't going to make it any worst."

Logic puts the cocaine away. "You're still only going to find a slimy chicken sandwich in there."

"Crap, I'm hungry." George turns around. "How long 'til we wake up?"

"Well, that depends on several factors, do you really need to know? You just snorted two lines of cocaine, how can you be hungry?"

George rubs his nose and sniffs "Well, I guess I'm not actually hungry, just mostly bored probably, but I still want to know when we wake up."

Logic sits down and starts to calculate when Paul should wake up. He takes in to account his general state of agitation as well as the noise of the neighbor children which seems to be a constant since school let out.

"Well, I figure we should wake up at around 9.30, give, or more likely take an hour."

George starts for the door. "So in about three hours then. Maybe I'll shut down for a while. I filed all my reports for morning already, seems to be no point just sitting around with you." He smiles, the joke is lost on Logic. You might have noticed Logic doesn't have much of a sense of humor. I take full responsibility for that.

The computer starts to beep. George cringes. "Crap." Walks over, and turns on the monitor. There is a general system message waiting:

6.20.98 / 6.02 am

General system message:

Paul has left compound in state of extreme agitation>
song playing on radio triggered memory of last night with Nicole>

report to sensory center at once>
Paul has cut off all direct communication>

out>

"Logic, we have a problem. Paul seems to be having some sort of an attack. We're supposed to go up to sensory right away."

Logic is absently staring at the 3D matrix with a stack of notes barely falling out of his hand.

George wraps on the table. "Did you hear me? It's 6.00 in the fucking morning and the lunatic is up and out. I figure he's not going for breakfast."

Logic walks over to the desk and picks up the phone. "Paul, direct voice contact. And locate Emotion."

He listens in obvious irritation. "When did he leave?" He listens for a moment. "Shit, when did Emotion get up there." He slams the phone down.

"The idiot has cut off direct communication and Emotion has been up in sensory for almost ten minutes. When did he start getting generals before we do?" He shakes his head, refocusing on the current situation. "Never mind, we'd better get up there and see what's going on."

The two leave the conference room and head towards the elevator.

Logic hesitates, you might remember his elevator problem. George tugs his arm. "Come on, let's just get up there."

Logic reluctantly gets in and the doors close. He complains about taking the elevator all the way up to sensory until George finally tells him to be quiet.

part 6

The sensory center is an oval room with three canted screens 8' high and 20' long, they run the length of one side of the room.

A bank of terminals sits under the screens with large seventies style swivel chairs behind each console.

The terminals are separately contained in their own consoles. They are basic and relatively primitive, though marginally more advanced than those in the rest of the building.

A rounded joy stick with three positional rubber coated buttons at the base sits on each console. The buttons all control a perspective view or *concentrated position*.

A concentrated position is attained by locking on an element in the visual field, and relating it to all available elaborative information.

The elaborative information is processed by the computer and sent to the individual at the console as an indexed file. The individual can then access a limited amount of sequences related to the current content if any are available.

The supplementary sequences are played out in the lower left corner of the screen. These are usually choppy and missing information. Sometimes they blend with other loosely related sequences and supposed material, similar to the process of remembering an event. Memory is never objective or absolute regardless of how concrete it seems.

The consoles and chairs all sit on their own individual tracks which connect in a tight cross hatch in the floor, allowing the consoles to be positioned in any direction.

This autonomy is necessary for an individual to manipulate his perspective without interfering with that of the others. Instead of the images moving and creating a complete in perspective, the individual moves, changing only his perspective.

This autonomous effect on perspective is a function of how the screens are constructed. They are made of three

layers of transparent high density image activated material. Each layer physically moves independently of the others in relation to movement through the outside environment.

This type of independence, along with the proportionally scaled correspondence to depth, resulting from the relational depth of the screen layers, offers a true 3 dimensional effect.

Emotion is sitting at one of the consoles, he is shaking considerably with hands gripped to the sides of the chair. His computer screen flows continually with charts of indexed files he doesn't understand.

The main view-screens are all violated with a yellow tinge. They maintain the image of an empty street moving quickly by through a car window.

Emotion pulls a rigid turn to the other two. "You guys, what's he doing?"

Logic sits at one of the consoles and flips on the terminal. He types in a sequence of codes to access the ten last recognizable auditory information sequences in backwards order.

The sound of a starting car is first, then the door shutting, then the ladder to the loft. The next sound is a Velvet Underground song. Logic instructs the computer to display all recent visual elaborations linked to this sound.

A small rectangular box appears in the corner of the large screen and there she is, Nicole, wearing his gray flannel pajamas and his glasses, dancing and placing his hands on her erect nipples under the shirt.

Logic turns red and starts to hyper-ventilate. "Aaaaggggh! is that what this is about?" He raises a stiff hand. "Never mind, what else could this be about."

Emotion stands up and turns to George. "Where are we going George?"

George shrugs and turns to Logic.

Logic looks up from the console after stopping the pajama sequence by punching the keyboard.

"I know exactly where we're going, that stupid bastard is going to the bus stop to see her." He turns to Emotion.

"Emotion, I need you to go downstairs to my office and wait for a direct from me. Have my instruments ready and have a drink while you're there. There's a bottle of Baily's in my desk."

To Logic and George's surprise, Emotion leaves without a word.

George watches Emotion leave, he makes a that was weird, but I'll accept it because it was easier than I thought it would be face. "That was weird, I can't believe he just left like that. Much easier than I thought it would be. What are you doing with a bottle of Baily's anyway?"

Logic punches the monitor back on. "He didn't want to be here for this, and he would fuck it all up if the idiot actually does manage to find her. And I keep the Baily's just in case I need to sedate Emotion." He starts to access a file which contains a matrix he constructed based on Paul's behaviors in relation to Nicole so far.

This file dates back to the beginning, when Logic started warning Paul the matrix wasn't fitting into the suppositions she was evoking.

He starts plowing through the folder, pausing to scribble madly against the small pad in his hand.

"Well, it looks like he is planning to make contact."

George lights a cigarette and sits down. "Obviously Einstein, why the hell do you think we're not still in dream land."

"Yes, thank you George, anyway, it looks like he is attempting contact. This is a bad idea in our erratic state of course, and regardless she isn't exactly perky in the morning."

He accesses another folder.

"Maybe there is some way to predict the outcome accurately..." He trails off and starts searching the data.

George stands up. "I can predict the outcome just fine. She's going to lumber up to the bus stop with a cup of coffee in her hand and Paul's going to get out of the car. Next she sees him and starts screaming. Then we get hauled away to jail after being subdued by everyone at the bus stop. It's very easy Logic." He gets up and leaves the room.

Logic is trying to ignore him, and is too engrossed in the data to notice his departure. "Well George, there seems to be no effective resolution, see here....George?"

He turns around and shakes his head. He picks up the receiver. "Has Paul opened up communication?"

Logic puts the phone down and lights a cigarette.

George walks in with a tool box. "Let's go, we need to stop this before it turns into a fray."

Logic gets up and follows without a word.

They ride the elevator one floor down and walk quickly to Paul's room.

DEVO at top volume vibrates the heavy door in it's frame:

something about the way you taste
makes me want to clear my throat
there's a method to you're movements
that really gets my goat
i looked for sniffy linings
but you're rotten to the core
i've had about all i can take
you know i can't take no more
got a gut feeling.....

Logic knocks on the door, and stands there waiting as if Paul is about to open it.

George looks at him and shakes his head. "You idiot, do you really think he's just going to open the door, just like that?. Even if he would, which he wouldn't, he couldn't hear you with the music blasting."

Logic nods and steps back from the door.

George opens the tool box and pulls out two crowbars, a drill, a wad of what looks like red clay, some string, two pairs of noise dampening headphones and a Taurus .38 five shot with a Pachmeyer grip.

Logic gasps and starts to grab for the gun. "You can't shoot him you stupid fuck!"

George pulls the gun away and swats Logic across the top of the head. "I'm not you moron, as much as I'd love

to... Shit, here." He hands Logic a set of headphones. Logic puts them on and keeps glancing nervously at the gun.

George drills two holes in the door frame, wads the clay into the holes and sticks the string into the clay.

Logic eyes him suspiciously, adjusting and re-adjusting the headphones. "What are you doing?"

George keeps working the clay into the door frame. when it's packed in, he grabs the two crowbars. "Okay, I'm going to...take the headphones off Logic."

Logic just stands there looking at him. He winces when George pulls the headphones from his head and hands them to him, speaking very slowly. "Okay, I'm going to give you one of these crowbars. But before I do, I'm going to tell you what I'm about to do, Okay?"

He waits for an answer.

Logic nods. "Okay."

George begins again. "You have to promise to think for a minute after I tell you, don't just react. I want you to think about two things okay?"

Logic nods.

George holds up one of the crowbars. "Okay, what I want you to think about for one, is that after I give this to you, I'll still have a crowbar in my hand, and I would win in a crowbar battle."

Logic looks at the crowbar, he nods.

George points at the door. "The other thing I want you to keep in mind that I do all of the maintenance around here, and anything I break, I have to fix. Also keep in mind that if I were mad at you, you'd be trying to build matrices in the dark."

This is true, the George doing all of the maintenance around here part. He was charged with maintaining the place almost immediately upon his arrival, being the only one who is ever mechanically inclined; except for me. But as you can probably tell, I'm too busy to bother with fixing things.

Logic nods suspiciously. "Okay."

George points to the clay. "This is plastic explosive."

Logic's face twitches.

"Logic, just listen, okay?"

Logic nods.

"Okay, I'm going to blow the door off it's hinges, then we're both going to wedge these crowbars in and jimmy it open."

"Okay." Logic puts his hand out.

George is stunned. "Just like that? Okay? That's it...huh, well, okay, here." He hands Logic the crowbar.

Logic moves instantly at the plastic explosive, scraping it off the door frame with the crowbar before George can even register what's going on. He starts waving the crowbar in front of George's face and yelling with his eyes closed. "You inebriate, you can't blow up the door, what if you hit Paul, do you want to be stuck here in this fucking moment?!! Because I don't!"

George grabs the crowbar and pushes Logic away. His voice is calm.

"Logic, first of all, the explosion is going to be on this side of the door. Second of all, the longer we stand here arguing like retards, the more of a chance that moron in there is going to wind up getting us incarcerated. There is no matrix in prison, you wouldn't like it, trust me. Also, if someone's going to fuck me in the ass, I at least want to invite him in."

George knew that would stun him.

"Now here take this and pick up your headphones." He hands Logic the crowbar and turns to replace the plastic explosives.

Logic takes the crowbar, picks up his headphones and slowly backs up. "You haven't been in jail, have you?"

George sighs and keeps working.

"Well, let's see Logic, you've known me since Paul created me, have I been in jail?" He makes a thinking face. "No... no I haven't. I did know this guy Benny in Boston though, you probably don't remember him, he was one of those side characters added for color. Benny was in jail, used to go on about it all the time, scarred for life, no question. How could you not be, living in the same building for years with lots of your closest enemies."

He twists the fuses together and takes a drag off his cigarette. "Okay, turn around."

He lights the fuse and notices Logic is still facing the door clutching his headphones to his ears. He grabs him by the shoulders and turns him around.

The explosion pounds the hinges off with a flattened snap. The door hangs from the jamb at an off angle.

George pushes the door aside and moves into the smoky room.

Logic follows cautiously. "I guess we didn't need the crowbars after all."

The room is cluttered with pages from rewritten letters to Nicole, cigarette butts and empty ether bottles. Dirty plates are stacked against the walls. Debris from broken furniture is swept into the far corner.

Two turtles sit in the cat dish with party ribbons stuck to their shells bloated on crunchy 'x's. *The Medium Cat*, Paul and Robl's cat, sits in the corner farthest from the door eyeing the whole scene suspiciously. The DEVO record is skipping:

i never touched her, i never touched her, i never touched her...

Paul sits in the console tank. This is the mechanism through which movement and contact with the outside world is routed.

The tank is filled with a viscous green electrolyte which registers all movement against sensors embedded in the inner surface of the tank walls.

He wears a suit similar to the one used in the dream room. This also has a structure which registers all friction, rigid entities, pressure and temperature, according to information routed to the suit from the sensory systems.

Paul is the only individual who experiences the tactile sensations of the outside world.

All transmissions (dialogue) sent out to the tangible world are pieced together from a library of material on file. If a situation is presumed to need information not

already available, new phrases are added by Paul. The dialogue is selected via a pupil movement sensor in the goggles, confirmation is executed by length of attention by the pupil to the phrase.

Real-time conversation is made possible through automatic linking trees; which route responses in chunks of information drawn from a bank of statements and presupposed responses.

Paul is in a seated position motioning as if he is smoking a cigarette.

George turns and dramatically flips his cigarette across the room for effect. "Okay Logic, how do we get him out of there without creating a rift?"

He refers to the fact that if they were to disturb Paul in the tank, he would likely assume that he's hallucinating. Suddenly there would be this movement which is inconsistent with the outside environment. In his tenuous state this would undoubtedly cause another attack.

Logic turns slowly and looks at George. "You moron. I thought you had this all figured out. But instead you blew up the door to get in here for no reason?" He walks over to the door and acts as if he's surveying the damage. "At least you have to fix it. This might have been an adventure for you, but I have more sensible ways of entertaining myself."

George shakes his head. "No you don't Logic, you don't have any ways of entertaining yourself." He walks over to the tank and examines the contact points.

These are a set of cables which allow each individual to interface with the input systems in the internal processing element via their computer terminals; the junction between the individuals and Paul while he's in the tank.

"Well, he obviously underestimated us Logic (or actually, me). He didn't think we'd actually get in here (or that I would). He has our contacts unplugged from the bottom of the tank, he didn't expect us to be able to just plug them back in."

Logic shakes his head, his face shows a red tinge under the grime left from the explosion. "No George, he didn't

think we'd be dumb enough to to blow up the door. Or more accurately that you'd be dumb enough to blow up the door."

George makes an ignoring face and starts reconnecting the terminals. "Can you just check to see if communication is back on line after I plug us back in?"

Logic starts toward the computer, which sits on the floor in the corner surrounded by empty beer bottles.

He clears a path through the bottles with his foot and tries to access the communication terminal.

"Well, it seems he just unplugged us to throw us off, maybe he did think you'd blow up the door. He seems to have set up some sort of lock out in the system." He opens the main access files and starts plowing through data. "If we, sorry, if *I* can figure out an access point I may be able to negate his commands, unlikely though."

He starts accessing any files which might skirt the rim of the lockout; essentially trying to develop a side door through loosely related links within the generally elaborated algorithms.

After a few minutes, the screen is covered by a continual flow of numbers and phrases. The characters run, then stop, then the same sequence loops and runs again.

"Huh, I didn't gain access but I found the cause of the recent thinking problems. A ruminating algorithm. Basically George, the stupid bastard covertly set up a repeating algorithm to maintain his skewed opinion of her regardless of inputted information. Although he didn't bury it very well." He makes a relatively satisfied face. "He must have underestimated me; that I'd eventually find it that is."

He starts to print out the algorithm and walks over to George.

"It blocks out all access points, we've essentially been locked out since he set up this wall. Who knows how long it's been running, most likely since the first time he kissed her. I'll look it over later and see if I can find a generation date, and any possible holes. He buried the file with some sort of arbitrary string of call elements. I just happened to hit it by accident. There's likely another set to call the generating file. I'll run a search once I pinpoint when it was incorporated."

He walks over to the printer and absently rips the two foot scroll with a gentle resignation. "This place stinks from your bomb, let's go to my office. There's nothing I can do here anyway. I don't even want to look at him."

George steps into the elevator. "You taking the stairs? Or do you want to ride with me."

Logic shakes his head and steps in, the paper trails behind him. He pulls the rest of the paper through and the doors shut and stands in a low slump, wiping the grime from his face with a handkerchief.

George softly pushes the button and leans against the wall looking up at the broken ceiling tiles.

Neither of them say a word, they realize the likely consequences of Paul's actions.

They take turns motioning as if about to say something but resolve to just shake their heads and look around the elevator.

The doors open and Logic darts out.

George follows slowly. "In the very least she's going to call the authorities."

part 6

They walk into the completely dark office.

Logic trips over Emotion who is lying on the floor in a pool of vomit with an empty bottle of Baily's cradled against his face.

George bends down and feels his pulse. "Well, he's not dead."

Logic pushes himself up with a grunt, and gathers the printout which unraveled across the floor when he fell. "Well that's comforting." He heads to the desk and fumbles into the drawer. He pulls out the mirror, glass tube and razor, and carefully places them on the desk. He grabs a small lamp from behind the chair and places it on the clean side of the desk. "Leave the main lights off, better he's inactive else we might have to restrain him."

He empties the blue vial across the mirror and starts to chop the soft chunks into an excessive pile of perfect white powder. "If we're about to be clubbed and hauled off by the authorities, we likely need all the dopamine re-uptake inhibition we can pull off."

George walks over to the window and grabs the bottle of Johnny Walker.

"Agreed buddy, want a drink?"

Logic doesn't look up, he's focused on his methodical chopping. "Um...no, I think a straight stimulant-euphoric-anesthetic combo is indicated."

George uncaps the bottle and leans against the window. "Suit yourself. What we really need is some opiate narcotics; would settle the whole thing right down."

Logic continues chopping. "Well George, you can have your opiates. You know I don't like them, they make me foggy. Though I must admit, I was *almost* able to tolerate Emotion the few times I was on them."

The computer beeps interrupting the point George is apparently going to make to go with the finger he's raising. He puts the finger away and hits the receive button, the screen flares green into the darkness. "You have a direct."

Logic bends to pull another draw. "Go ahead and read it."

6.20.98 / 7.03 am

direct system message/Logic:

dream in progress requires intervention>

out>

George flips off the screen and heads towards the cocaine. "The idiot fell asleep, you're supposed to go down

for intervention." He picks up the glass tube and takes a heavy pull from the pile; Logic didn't bother separating out lines.

Logic makes a surprised face. "Really, that's excellent, give me the tube."

He stabs the tube into the pile and takes a draw. "Huh, that's good, very good. ('sniff') I'm sure she saw the car, and is probably calling the authorities right now from work. But at least we avoided direct conflict ('sniff')."

He leaves the room, being careful not to step in the puddle of congealing vomit surrounding Emotions head.

George sends a request to the system for indirect monitoring of the dream. He's allowed "high potential lateral access".

In this sense the word potential is used in the same way it's used to describe wattage.

Access is afforded to the individual based on the relative density of the experience within the dream, to the dreamer (Paul). The information is classified *lateral* because it passes through a set of tangential filters before it is sent to the individual. These filters pull out random chunks of information, leaving mostly propositional elements (only the *meaning* of the event; in relation to the dream) which are stacked to afford a sketch of the dream content.

The level of information provided is identical to that which would be transmitted to each individual after the dream is over, only in this case it's transmitted in real-time.

The individual receives a stunted version of the dream in both cases; mostly core propositional content and random imagery.

This is not unlike the content usually remembered by any dreamer, including yourself, upon waking.

Logic enters the prep room. He puts on the helmet and activates the remote computer, so he can read the briefing while he gets dressed:

6.20.98 / 7.12 am

direct system message /Logic:

Paul is stuck in an infinite loop>
this is represented by a series of trails at the coastline>
he is walking on the same trails in an attempt to construct simulated matrices in relation to Nicole>
sleep cycle is to be terminated>
more aggressive approach to matrix suggested>
you will be placed in a position to intercept Paul 45 seconds after prep>
he will approach 73 degrees right in relation to the direction you are facing once placed>
placement in four minutes>

out>

Logic heads into the prep room. "More aggressive approach. Well that's general."

The suit pulls tight and Logic is placed in stasis.

Suddenly he's standing on a lightly wooded trail ten feet from the cliff which hangs over the coastline.

Paul approaches moments later, he stops after noticing Logic. "Logic, how's it going."

Logic steps sideways to allow the tiny growling goat to pass. "Well, I was working through the matrix, and figured some things out. Come over to the clearing for a minute."

Paul follows Logic over to the steep coastline. The water five hundred feet below is calm and recedes into a perfect dark blue.

Logic points up. "See that red spot up there? I want you to look at it and tell me exactly how big you think it is."

Paul looks up at the red spot hovering miles into the sky. "Um, okay...I'd saaaay." Logic pushes Paul off the cliff.

Five seconds before Paul hits the rocks below they are both pulled into stasis. Paul is awake.

Logic is taken out of stasis first. Paul's reintegration process is different from that of the other individuals. He remains in stasis until his suit is automatically removed, then placed back into the bed, which is lifted into his room via a direct cable elevator. This is necessary as he must go back and complete all stages of sleep.

He is essentially shut down and instantly placed into NREM sleep until reintegrating back into the dreaming process, or heading into the waking period.

Paul never sees the dream room.

part 7

George is still in the office when Logic returns.

A black piece of heavy paper is taped to the wall. In one hand George holds a paint stained cigarette, the other hand is rubbing oil pastels into the paper, his eyes are wide.

He grabs the bottle of bourbon from the conference table and points at the puddle of mostly Baily's which creates a negative outline where Emotion's face and shoulders were. "Watch out for the vomit."

Logic walks over to his desk and notices the almost empty mirror. "You asshole, you snorted up most of the cocaine."

George pulls at the bourbon. "I left you some. Besides, we seem to be having some sort of creative breakthrough here. Let it go." He puts down the bourbon and starts painting again. "So that was abrupt."

Logic reaches across the desk for the razor blade. "What was abrupt? Why aren't you painting in your room? Where's Emotion? Never mind, I don't care as long as he's not here. Why then did you snort up most of the cocaine?" He starts to cut small perfect lines out of the diminished rations. "You know, I should start hiding this stuff, why aren't you painting in your room? You're going to make a mess."

George pauses dramatically and waits for Logic to look up, which doesn't happen. "I had lateral access, you pushed him off the cliff. In and out of there. Quick thinking Logic, I like it."

He throws the cigarette into the garbage pile, lights another one and continues painting. "I mean, we had to get him up and out of there right? Though, he could have hit the rocks, had a heart attack and...end of story." He makes a fluttering motion with his smoking hand. "Oh, and to answer your question, my room doesn't have a pile of drugs in it."

Logic fondles the small lines with the razor until they're perfectly symmetrical. "You mean your room didn't have a pile of drugs in it, or whatever I mean, you know what I mean. Shit, you snorted up the drugs, look at this, the rest is mine."

He pulls up one of the lines, open's a drawer, makes sure George isn't watching, puts the mirror away and locks the drawer. "Are we out of the parking lot?"

George turns around when he hears the works rattle into the drawer. "Yeah, as soon as he woke up he realized she was there and gone already. I think he was too tired to think about the whole thing too much. We're home now."

The computer beeps, George walks over to the console and pushes the button. He glances at the screen, makes an I can't be bothered face and walks back to the painting.

Logic watches this and walks over to the screen with a huff. "Are you going to tell me what it says, or do I have to do an interperative dance."

This makes George smile. He likes it when Logic tries to emulate him because he usually gets it wrong.

Logic always secretly admires George from the beginning. It's almost as if he wishes he could pull off the freedom George maintains. Of course, that's not possible, where would we be if I allowed that. Besides, it's entertaining. It's as close as Logic comes to making a joke, even though he doesn't know it.

He hits the *read general* key:

6.20.98 / 8.40 am

general transmission:

communications are re-opened>
have been contacted by authorities>
meeting of all individuals will commence in fifteen minutes>
in conference room>
bring notes and consider suggestions>

out>

Logic laughs, not a real laugh but a loud exaggerated laugh. He drifts over to the desk, sits down and lights a cigarette. "So now the prick wants our help. Fuck head!"

George turns from his painting. The black smudge which surrounds his lips from the paint covered cigarettes gives him the look of a demented clown. He raises one eyebrow and smiles, revealing a blackened front tooth making him look even more demented. "Temper buddy, someone has to figure it out. We're the only ones holding the marbles at this point (or maybe ever), so it falls on us. Of course that doesn't mean I like it."

He pulls from the bottle, missing his mouth and dribbling it all over his shirt. He shrugs, makes a that was perfect for my mood face and turns on the painting.

Logic tries to raise one eyebrow as soon as George turns around but winds up screwing up his face instead. "Shit doesn't he realize I have my own projects going in the laboratory." He stops screwing up his face and looks at the blank window residedly. "I don't have time for this."

You might wonder why there are windows when there's nothing outside. I don't know so don't bother me about it.

He stops looking at the window. Like I said, there's nothing to see so why bother. "Well, our actions on this whole thing appear to be pretty simple. The first thing we need to do is call the lawyer. Then make sure neither of our friends with the thinking errors even consider contact with her."

George walks over to Logic and touches his shoulder.

"If they do, I really think we should build some sort of lockout device. We could easily just knock them down to a purely mechanistic level. Then we could grab the reins at any time without consequence or argument."

Logic's mouth starts to spasm, his face tightens into an unbalanced frown.

George thinks Logic's pissed about the lockout statement, but he was just trying trying to raise one eyebrow. "I'm kidding, jees lighten up. We should start documenting not only her behaviors, but also pull out any written communications which indicate he was attempting to resolve the situation positively. I don't think there's a problem, if the authorities have any length of contact with her they'll figure out she's nuts and leave us alone."

Logic starts drawing lines on a sheet of graph paper. He fumbles through the pile on the messy part of the desk and pulls out the *flexible ruler*.

The flexible ruler is about the thickness and shape of a long oval pencil. It incorporates an indexed slider to mark points with indicated accuracy.

This allows the precise measurement of segmented and angled lines from generation point to termination point, which is useful in drawing up plans for 3D matrices before starting actual construction.

Logic doesn't usually let the other individuals near the 3D construction kit, which doesn't really take much effort because the others see it as a pain in the ass.

"George, come over here for a minute. It appears there are some pockets here which may not only get us out of the looping algorithm, but may subsequently degrade the Nicole system in general."

George puts down the bourbon and walks over to the other side of the table, avoiding the vomit. "Just so you know, I'm not cleaning that up, and it's going to stink like fuck by tomorrow."

Logic glances casually at the puddle. "Maybe Emotion will, it is his mess." He doesn't care as usual, just another mess far away from the desk. "Anyway George, see this route here, it represents the path of interaction created by the algorithm Paul set up so he could continue being delusional." He pauses for effect, and to be sure George is listening. "There is one flaw in the pattern however which may give us a way in. The algorithm presupposes alternate definitions based on previous input from us, this flaw may offer a vulnerability point."

He pauses again to be sure George is following. Satisfied that he's at least paying attention, Logic continues. "The algorithm is activated if negative information regarding Nicole presented. It then overrides that input, masks it as free disk space, and loops through a secondary algorithm activating positive imagery until the information is written over. I think it's probable that if we present information that is at a tangent; not a simple slam on her directly, it may not trigger his algorithm and will bypass the loop."

He mashes his cigarette into the graph, again for effect, considers the hole he just made in the paper and places the butt in the ashtray.

"The idiot was so bent on holding on to his image of her, he didn't leave any room for information which goes beyond anything we might tell him. Basically, the filter in place is vulnerable to a complete change in definition. We may get that in this situation. I doubt he presupposed she would go completely nuts and contact the authorities."

George dips his head around the desk. "Huh." He leans over and tries a casual pull at the locked drawer.

Logic smacks his arm.

"Get out of there fiend, you had all of yours (and some of mine) already, pay attention."

Logic continues, keeping one hand on the drawer handle. "Basically, if he winds up focusing on Nicole as a threat, he won't be able to see her as a potential mate any longer. The algorithm isn't set up to filter out that type of new information. Essentially, "Nicole", will no longer equal "Nicole" in the new system. I think the best way for us to facilitate this is to try to build as many elaborations between the authorities, our need to take an aggressive, proactive position, and of course not tell him any of this. Or kill him and get the whole thing over with."

He surprises himself, chooses to ignore the fact he just said that. "We don't need him sneaking down and filing a new algorithm to gate off this information. He'll wind up sitting there like a drooling idiot in court if the situation takes that route and the algorithm is still in place."

George sloppily leans over the desk looking for the keys.

Logic smacks his hand again. "No George, the keys are hidden. You're too drunk to be sly, just give it up. Another thing we need to do here is be absolutely sure not to say anything negative about her until the new information channels are stabilized. We could wind up creating an elaborative connection to the new information and pull the whole thing into the shredder." He puts the papers away and lights another cigarette. "Would you pour me a glass of bourbon, I don't want to get paint on my hands."

George walks over to the table, grabs a glass and heads for the bourbon.

Logic pulls the mirror out from under the chair, sneaks up a line and quickly slides the mirror back under his chair.

Paul walks in with a cup of coffee, wearing a bathrobe and no shoes. "Are there any drugs left?"

Logic sits back and puffs on his cigarette. "Did you talk to the authorities?"

Paul nods and points out the door. "Yeah, I did. Why is Emotion laying in the hall in a pool of vomit?"

George hands Logic a glass of bourbon. "He drank a bottle of Baily's while you were trying to make an idiot out of yourself. Well, not exactly *trying*, exactly, more *making*. I thought we were done with that part Paul. Just leave him out there, he doesn't even know what's going on at this point."

Paul shuts the door quietly. "No wonder I feel strangely centered."

He walks over to the window and steps in the pool of vomit. "This is not okay. Jees."

George looks at him casually. "You might consider wearing shoes around here if these episodes are going to continue."

Paul wipes his feet on the carpet. "Don't think I'm cleaning this up, I have enough to deal with."

George sits down. "No one's going to clean it up, we all have enough to deal with, especially with you holding the reins. It's just going to dry up and spindle a sickly sweet edge to the stench of the garbage pile."

Paul stops and looks at the pile of garbage. "You know, I've always thought it was odd that you just let that pile fester in the corner Logic. It's so disorganized, not to mention it stinks. You spend pretty much all of your time in here, doesn't it bug you?"

Logic points to the garbage pile. "Pile of garbage..." He points to the desk. "Desk. No problem. If it stinks I can always point the fan in the other direction and turn on the vents. What did the authorities say?"

"Well, apparently she's been filing reports against me all along, do you believe that? She said I was harassing her. I called her three times in three weeks."

Logic's face is calm, he gently touches his fingers at the tips. "Did you call the lawyer?"

George is sure he sees a curl of smoke drift out of Logic's left ear.

Paul seems agitated by the question. "Yeah I called the lawyer. He called the authorities, they said she's obviously crazy and they won't bother me again. They also said they were following up on an old report, apparently she didn't even call them today, it's just a coincidence they chose today to call me. So I assume from your tight jawed silence on the subject that there aren't any drugs left."

Logic scribbles some notes on a small pad. "We still need to take a proactive defensive posture. For one thing, she was receiving weird phone calls for a year before she met you. She may be giving you credit for those calls (which you witnessed plenty of times) in her delirium. We need to somehow establish a record. You'll need to document her behaviors, the specifics of the termination, her continual clambering about past mistakes, and her obvious problems with previous relationships. Be sure to keep any anger out of it, make it as dry as possible. Get the lawyer to write her a letter and send a copy to the authorities. That should take care of the whole thing. If it doesn't; if she is so set on holding on to this conflict, we can file a lawsuit against her for filing false allegations."

George shifts in his seat and looks at the painting. "She doesn't own anything except for that lame car."

Logic slips the glass tube out of his shirt pocket. He holds it lightly between two fingers and taps it on the edge of the desk sending out a muffled ring. As expected, this causes George to turn around.

Logic places the tube back in his pocket. "The point George, is not to take away her stuff. This is not about revenge, she didn't effect us in that capacity, and already made a fool out of herself. Not only within our boundaries, but now she's involved neutral third parties. No, there is obviously no need for revenge, this is about making sure she is out of our hair, end of story (this part of the story, not the whole thing). She is nothing to us. We can finally move on to the important things without her clutching at our heels."

Paul stands up and wobbles a bit, he sits back down. "Okay, I'll start the letter. Later, when I can write."

Logic shakes his head, walks over to the door and opens it. He speaks very slowly. "No, you'll call the lawyer, he'll start the letter. You'll start the documentation." He motions out the door. "What are you going to do Paul?"

"Start the documentation." Paul gets up successfully and walks over to the painting. "Good, we need this, the writing is good, but we need to be sure not to ignore the visceral element."

George turns his chair to face the painting. "I think some vicodin is in order, maybe you should take a trip to the hospital."

Paul gives the painting a light stroke, wipes his finger off on his pants. "Good, we need this; to start with the painting again." He heads to the door. "And the hospital thing, already in the works, will do as soon as I get out of here. I can already feel my back tensing up." He throws them both a smile. "Okay boys, see you again." He leaves the room.

Logic shuts the door shaking his head and smiling at the floor. "That went well." He walks over to the painting. "So what are you painting anyway?"

The painting, is actually only a painting by their own definition. George, and by default Paul, exclusively uses oil pastels, rubbing the lines and fields into a soft submission. They are essentially finger paintings, but start off as thick drawings.

They both consistently get incredibly drunk while painting, this offers a child like line quality.

This particular painting is in gray scale, mostly blended slashes against a black field, offering a warped three dimensional effect.

George walks over and stands next to Logic, he lights a cigarette. "It's her personality, the real one." He points at the chaotic painting. "I figured it was time to try and throw some covert algorithms of our own into the mix."

Logic looks at George with a surprised face. "Huh. You know George, you may look like a haggard bum, you may not be able to feed yourself effectively, or remember to change your clothes, my suspicion is that you drizzle into your pants after you pee, you smoke too much, way too much, you

pick your nose and wipe it on the table, I don't remember seeing you for more than an hour without a drink in your hand, if that. I mean to look at you, I'd give you about a week on your own. But George, sometimes you appear to be able to pull it together, to an extent."

George looks at Logic with a furrowed brow. "Um... I think I'll shut down for a while." He climbs on to the conference table and lies down.

part 8

Logic is sitting at the desk playing with two pencils. He balances them at the tips and lets them fall to the desk top, watching carefully in an attempt to predict how they'll land. "I can entertain myself." He glances at George sprawled on the table. "I'm entertained..." He's interrupted when the computer goes off.

He walks over, hits the receive button, looks at the screen and walks back to the desk.

"George, it's a direct to both of us. George?" George is shut down.

Logic slips the mirror from under his chair. "Well in that case, I'll take the liberty of..." He pulls a thin line, puts the mirror back under the chair, walks back over to the computer and starts to read.

6.20.98 / 9.50 am

direct transmission / Logic / George

documented termination of "relationship">

seems to have helped perspective>

spoke with lawyer>

he is composing letter>

have also composed accompanying text to be sent out after receipt of his>

out>

Logic stares at the message for a while, as if trying to ease some level of sensibility out from between the lines. He decides there's no point and considers a more satisfying strategy:

6.20.98 / 10.07 am

direct transmission / Paul

listen you twisted lunatic>
if you send that letter out you not
only invalidate our position to the
lawyer, but you also no doubt will wind up hearing from the authorities again>
if you want to send it ask the lawyer first>

out>

He walks over to the desk mumbling, pulls the last line, grabs at his drink and knocks it on the ground. He ignores this and turns on the audio access system.

The audio access system routes cached audio files to individual speaker systems.

An individual can access specific sounds related to memory files, conversations which have been committed to disk, and any music recently attended to.

They (more accurately, Logic under relentless requests by Paul) originally try to set up the system to cache all music attended to. But for the most part anything heard in the distant past is spotty.

Songs would mix together, instruments playing wrong parts and words garbled. The only thing which was always on was the rhythm and tonality.

This was of no surprise to Logic; it seemed to him the only stable access points would lie in those two places. This is because the system accesses and stores files in a manner similar to how words are accessed from memory:

Words are committed and accessed through first letter and amount of syllables.

You may notice if someone is trying to sound out a word, they'll sound out the first letter, then usually bob their head or move their finger to the amount of syllables. If they think they know these two components, they're usually right.

The elaborative process, which this is a component of on a propositional level, is flexible in it's application. All aspects of the plastic mind are.

Logic chooses a music link and walks over to the computer. He usually likes to listen to composers who gravitate towards an excessive level of consistency in the application of rhythm, like Philip Glass or Steve Reich.

But those works haven't been refreshed in years, and so the files have degenerated. If he tries to access any of those works, all he gets is disjointed blips and voices.

He chooses Soul Coughing, he likes the drummer and the lyrics seem to fit his mood:

Something I can't comprehend
Something so complex and
Couched in its equation
So dense that light cannot escape from
In the dark your brain glows
And it goes
Way um way, way um way um
I know you're a supra genius
Will you shoot the blue earth down?
In the space station
Polishing the ray gun
You say correlation is not causation

Logic sits down and pours himself a new drink. He needs to make some notes on this last episode; total fuck up to be so restricted as not to predict this outcome. He should know better.

He starts to type out a long and specific list of hierarchical access points. He wants to hide this admission of guilt, no question.

All personal files are accessed through a hierarchy of *call elements*.

This provides the individuals with a level of privacy in a sense. The files can be accessed, but only if the individual accessing the file is very specific in calling up the hierarchy. This provides not only privacy, but quick access if the individual is looking for specific information. This provides a lockout system with a direct safety mechanism.

No one winds up stumbling on personal files unless the author intends for them to be accessed.

At first, Emotion has a terrible time with this system and keeps forgetting his call elements.

He winds up bothering Logic constantly, asking him to help him to access what appears (to Logic) to be the most useless and redundant crap.

Eventually Logic helps him figure out a "better" system. This consists of filing all of Emotion's data by date, subject, and in alphabetical order. The result of this is Emotion spends hours going through pages of generalized lists.

Logic lights a cigarette and absently places it in the ashtray, next to the other lit cigarette, which you've likely noticed, he does a lot.

One trick he uses to bury private notes is to throw in unrelated terms. The archaic system is incredibly linear, at least the filing system is. Even a bulk folder can be embedded simply by deflecting the search engine with "limiting nodes" as Logic likes to refer to them.

If he really wants to hide something, he'll throw in a series of numbers. He has an incredible memory for strings of data, so he can recall huge numerical strings with accuracy.

Regardless, he doesn't hide much, and so there isn't too much to remember anyway.

He does decide to tag the end of the string with a *lateral access call element* (a tag which allows partial access to designated information in the file which will route the reader to related files) in case anyone wants to access other writings on the subject.

Logic likes it when the other individuals look up his texts, so why block everything he figures. Although the other individuals rarely bother to read anything he writes.

He grabs for his cigarette without looking and finds he has two, picks the longer one and types out the header:

system file / Logic / post: 58600022575h6463v374576454n / title.reference: Ncl /
post.conflict.doc1 / date.omitted / segment-10b / line.7 / reroute.385hjvjer567nicr-34 / reference:
constr.prob.spc>

The absence of any solid linear progression in this situation has blocked my many attempts to construct a matrix. The outcome which finally ensued, is not referenced at all in any notes on the subject because no prior situation of this generation afforded experience on the matter.

In retrospect though, it should have been obvious to me that her complete breakdown of contact with reality was probable.

Paul's attempt to block the system with a ruminating algorithm should have also been accounted for, or at least the potential recognized. Though of course it would be impossible to predict the specific mode of action in either case.

The absence of any consistent pattern of behavior on either of their parts should have made the predictions more flexible.

Instead the problem space became even more restricted. There is a certain level of distraction in this type of situation, but I am not susceptible to this distraction, though I still have no satisfying excuse for the restriction of my problem space.

The "problem space" is the arena for application of perspective in a given situation. This is a common problem in working out a system of any type. The problem space is incorporated in in several ways.

One of the most common, but also most hidden while the situation is current, is "over education". This is experiential or academic.

Long term experience with a system often leads to presupposed patterns of operation within that system, as well as similar systems.

Predetermined strategies are constructed, which in many cases are driven by reactions to previous experience, resulting in concretized judgment based on supposition.

Strategies are rendered static as a result of retardation of creative clarity. Elements acting on the situation which don't directly apply, regardless of their effect on the situation, become dangerously over looked.

There may be many other avenues of resolution in the situation. But we become blind to them because our perspective has been pre-set.

The only real solution is to remain flexible and continually re-educate the system without over educating in one direction.

A general system message breaks in while Logic's writing:

6.20.98 / 11.47 am

general system message:

Kari will me making direct contact 6.23.98 @ 2.00 pm (aprox)>

out>

Kari is a girl who Paul is with for a year and a half until about six months ago.

One day she tells him she's going to the coast, but instead goes up to Seattle to interview for a job.

After she moves, she winds up cheating on him and making like nothing happens.

He tries back then to talk to her about it, but she won't listen. So he winds up spiraling out into a flare of nastiness to try and bring a level of equity to the situation.

The whole system all but forgets about her once Nicole slides in.

Logic lights another cigarette and writes a quick general:

6.20.98 / 11.54 am

general transmission

consider the obvious possibility of transference>
re: Kari to Nicole>

out>

He gets up and puts his pack of cigarettes in his shirt pocket. He decides to change the music.

"Something soothing but not sleepy."

He chooses Marc Ribot's "Y LOS CUBANOS POSTITOS (The Prosthetic Cubans)".

The air in the room swells to Ribot's soft recreations of works by the late Cuban composer Arsenio Rodriguez. Stillness permeates, a new calm against the fray of the morning.

George is still shut down on the table, the vomit on the carpet is dry. Logic sits at the desk and pulls off his thick glasses. He adjusts the paper clip holding one of the arms in place and rubs his eyes until bright blue clouds spark across the shut lids.

He remembers Dali's answer when asked how he would entertain himself if he were locked in solitary confinement: "I would push on my eyes until I hallucinate."

Logic puts his glasses back on. The mirror pulls slowly into focus.

The last fluffy line is perfect in it's solitary whiteness.

Slowly, reaching gently as if trying to maintain the stillness of the room, he slides the mirror to the edge of the desk and looks directly into it. The line forms a soft slash across his mostly expressionless face.

He contemplates the possibility of more arriving later, reserves are low by his standards. He uses so much more than the others suspect, not that they would care.

Each individual is accepted regardless. There is no choice in this matter as their functions are completely alien to the others.

Even Emotion, while being misunderstood most of the time, is not held back from performing his primary function, regardless of how ridiculous his methods appear to the others.

Logic is only slightly less productive when he doesn't have any "fuel" as he often refers to it.

The primary effect when he runs out is tremendous tiredness for about two days. Luckily he's rarely out, because another effect is he doesn't get anything done.

He pulls the last cigarette from the pack, squeezes the end to loosen the tobacco, and tamps the loosened tobacco down with the butt of a pencil.

He methodically scrapes the razor across the mirror, the stray crumbs collect along the edge of the blade like soft clay.

With a lingering expert motion, he carefully slides the blade down across the edge of exposed paper. The line flakes gracefully into the cigarette end.

Placing thumb and forefinger gently together, he twirls the end with a singular twist forming a perfect cone, lights the tip with a match and inhales deeply.

The sudden rush offers the inhibition of dopamine re-uptake and seemingly negates the same effect on norepinephrine; therefore also negating the stimulant effect.

Over the last year, Logic writes volumes on the effects of this drug. His "experiments" as he calls them, actually

consist of excessive use accompanied by a certain level of documentation.

Logic as you may have surmised, is obsessive about documentation.

Although many of his notes on the subject are protected, Logic does maintain a public journal on the effects of the drug. He tries to keep plenty of general reference material archived for the others, mainly so they don't bother him with basic questions. Though they never have.

Following is an excerpt from Logic's public journal on the drug. Please keep in mind neural activity is extremely complex. Any system pulled from balance has a compensatory effect on other systems.

For Logic's purposes this text is sufficient, and so it is also sufficient for my my purposes here.

If you want to get into the finer points on the subject I suggest "Fundamentals of Neuropsychopharmacology" by Feldman and Quenzer: ISBN 0-87893-178-3. This in my opinion is the most concise and readable reference available.

Although the book was written in 1984, little has changed on the subject of illicit drugs on the level of unrestricted, honest research.

Logic went as far as to tag the header with the subject in place of his name so even Emotion could find it. He of course still managed to sneak his name into the title reference:

system file / cocaine / title.reference: Logic.on.cocaine / general reference.document / 4.17.98 /
segment: N/A: stand alone / reference:coc.eff.gen>

The main effect of cocaine is the inhibition of neuronal re-uptake of dopamine and norepinephrine.

Inhibiting the re-uptake of a neurotransmitter essentially concentrates it in the synapses; prolonging the activation of the effected neural pathways.

The most common mode of ingestion, which is of course sniffing the crystalline powder, offers the user a balance.

The stimulant effect of inhibiting the neuronal re-uptake of norepinephrine is combined with that of the same effect on dopamine; maintaining an increased activation of the pleasure centers.

The stimulant effect does appear to have a longer duration. Which accounts for the subsequent sleeplessness long after the drug is ingested.

Sublingual intake most definitely negates the euphoric effect. The response curve does seem to be drawn out in the case of stimulant effect in this case; lengthening duration while decreasing intensity. This is to be expected as absorption would be more gradual through these tissues.

Conversely, when smoked there is only an effect on dopamine "pleasure centers" and no detectable stimulant effect. This accounts for the physically addictive nature of the drug when it has been condensed and "free based" from it's hydrochloride component to form "crack".

I have found no basis for physical addiction to this drug in any other case. Although long term use may alter response mechanisms associated with dopaminergic and noradrenergic systems, cocaine is not an agonist (which increases neurotransmitter production), nor does it replace endogenous elements (such as heroin or other opiate narcotics).

As you are aware, I hold these two elements as the basis for physical addiction.

For a concise treatment of basic neurophysiology, please reference:

system file / Logic / title.reference: neurophys.gen.reference.document / 2.3.95 / segment:N-A:stand alone / reference:neurophys.genref>

Please access this document before bothering me if you have any confusion regarding the subject.

Logic exhales, slowly sending a curl of smoke into the swath of light under the lamp shade.

He counts backward from seventy-eight. This is how long he estimates the smoke will take to clear at it's current rate of dispersal, taking into account the absence of air currents and density of the cloud.

He realizes he must be tired, he failed to account for room temperature.

Logic breaks what could be construed as a smile, farts and slides back into the soft leather chair. He turns towards the wall and closes his eyes.

part 9

The room is still dark and George is still passed out on the table.

Logic gets up from the desk and walks over to George. He eyes him cautiously and pokes his arm to be sure he's still shut down. Satisfied, he slowly drifts over to the pile of garbage.

He winces and plucks George's spent burrito from the pile, moves it over four inches and lifts a wad of newspaper to reveal a black button.

Gently, he pushes a secret button embedded in the crevice, letting off a muffled click in the center of the pile.

Crouching in front of the pile, Logic carefully slides an arm between two leaves of cardboard at left center and pulls out a perfect square of seemingly random garbage fixed to a rectangular metal box on sliding tracks.

The box opens with a satisfying snap of the lid.

Inside is a carton of cigarettes, a small bag of cocaine still in rock form, and an envelope.

He grabs one of the rocks from the bag and two packs of cigarettes, glances over at George, and slides the box back into the pile.

part 10

George stirs with a moan and starts to sit up. Logic slips the rock into his pocket and walks back to the desk.

George slides off the table and slumps into the chair in front of the desk. "Can I have a cigarette?"

Logic opens one of the packs and hands George a cigarette.

George lights the cigarette and eyes the empty mirror. "Anything happen yet?"

Logic pulls the rock out of his pocket and places it on the mirror. "No, been pretty quiet so far."

"Yow! When did this come down?" George fingers the chunk lightly and licks the residue.

Logic grabs the zippo from his pocket and mashes the soft chunk into the mirror. The blade slices through the soft pancake with a crisp resistance. "I'll chop this up, why don't you go see if Emotion is still alive."

George gets up and goes into the front room. All that's left of Emotion is a film of dried vomit on the couch.

"Jees." He walks down the hall towards Emotion's room. As he approaches, he can hear Raymond Scott (the originator of Bugs Bunny soundtracks) emanating through the door.

"Uh oh." He turns around immediately and goes back to the conference room. "Well, he's likely alive, but he's also listening to Raymond Scott."

Logic pushes the mirror towards George. "Here, take your pick." He slumps back into the chair. "Terrific, Raymond Scott. Just what we need, more chaos."

George draws one of the long lines up and sits back. "This stuff seems different, when did it get here?"

Logic plugs another line, pours some water into his handkerchief and sniffs it into his nose. "So are you going to start painting in your room? Or are you planning to take over my office."

The computer beeps, Logic gets up and flips it on.
6.20.98 / 4.36 am

Direct transmission / Paul / Logic / George

fub ma glot>
ap lib ni pap>
help>
bad>
help bad>

out>

He turns the monitor off, absently walks back to the desk and pulls another healthy line through the glass tube.

"I think Emotion is having some sort of attack; garbled nonsense sent as a direct to all of us instead of a general."

George takes his second pull.

"I guess we should go see if he has any rope or matches in there. Who knows what kind of lunatic Paul would write in to replace him at this point."

They get up with short sniffs and head out to Emotion's room.

The door is open, smoldering pages from old journals spill out of the door and into the hall.

Inside, a heavy fog lingers waist high across the room. The walls are covered with randomly tacked up snapshots from memory; old girlfriends and pets mostly.

George rips a picture of Kathryn from the wall. "Shit, no wonder we never get any resolution around here."

The whole room has been demolished, debris everywhere Empty Baily's and Galliano bottles, the mattress sits up against the wall covering large holes made with the now splintered chair, a stench of ether and urine hangs above the smoke.

Raymond Scott still blares from the speaker, giving the room the feel of a twisted cartoon.

Logic turns the music off directly and looks around the room. "Well he's not here, let's get back to what we were doing."

A soft groan erupts from behind the mattress and George flips it down. The mattress slaps to the floor dispersing smoke around the room and exposing Emotion, who is laying on his side in a fetal position covered with pictures.

George and Logic sit on the mattress, each lights a cigarette.

George taps Emotion on the shoulder. "What's with all the hubub, bub? What's going on?"

Emotion starts mumbling something about menthol in his veins and the authorities out the window.

George picks up one of the pictures. It's a memory snapshot of Kari sitting on a bed in a San Francisco hotel room. She has one thumb cocked up and is winking. The word "mucho" is scrawled across the top, which is what she was saying at the time.

George shows the picture to Logic as if indicating this to be the cause, he flips it back to the pile around Emotion.

Logic picks up a small empty bottle lying on the floor next to the mattress. "That may have something to do with it, but I'll tell you what's going on here." He hands the bottle to George. "He drank a whole bottle of Vicks 44 Extra Strength. He's overdosed on dextromethorphan, and there's plenty of pseudoephedrine in there too, that accounts for the state of the room."

Emotion straightens up and glares straight ahead. "Bad. Bad!" He gets up on all fours and starts walking around the room, growling and lunging like a wild dog.

George stands up and walks over to the computer terminal, keeping a suspicious eye on Emotion.

A sticky red fluid covers the keyboard. "Jees, looks like he threw up a bunch of it. Well, should we let him ride it out? Or is there something we can do for him?"

Logic gets up and walks over to the computer. "Well there's nothing we can do about it, just leave him in here. We should probably get out before he bites me. Maybe get him some water. Huh, Paul didn't show up, I wonder why. Let's go back to my office and get back to what we were doing. We can check the messages from there, I'm not touching this keyboard."

They head into the conference room and shut the door. The terminal is already on, a series useless phrases cascade across the screen. Logic tries to access messages but there's no change.

"I can't get into the system, it's just spewing this nonsense. The heading says it's a transcript from the audio sensors, but I hope not."

George walks over to the terminal. "Can you print it?"

"Yeah, well maybe." Logic hits a series of keys together and the screen starts printing:

I am in conflict...what is the conflict?...okay, the conflict is: I am going insane, obviously, and...the only person who is going to understand, is Rob.

It is necessary that I contact Rob now...[...Hey! I'm using first person!...all right...I think we're getting better already!...okay, good good, first person is back...excellent, okay

So, now, I am going insane...I was taking a step towards sanity earlier by using first person, and I still am, so I still am....there, not completely, but

I am, I am using first person, and...I'm not grunting anymore, that's good...I'm using real words, and I'm not grunting, and I'm using first person, maybe we're taking this little road, back, to sanity...okay, good, now, what, do I need to do?

well...I guess that depends on whether I am wondering about what I am going to do with my whole...life?...Or what I need to think about, right now?

because there would be two completely different answers

with the whole life thing, I'd have to break it down to work, and personal things, and social things, what I have to do now, is, basically nothing

I don't have to do anything, I don't have to go to work, I don't have to go drive my car anywhere, I could just stand here all day, if I want to

ok...so...here I am...oh shit...aaaaggggh...I don't know what to do...I'll try calling...ok...now what?

hmmm...ok...sip some of the coffee, you should sit down, sitting down would be a good idea...there...put this in a more stable position

I don't want to sit down, all right...I'm feeling a little better, I think I'm feeling a little better

I'm still standing here talking to myself, that is not normal, I don't usually do that, okaaaaaay

well, birds chirping, okay...what started all this?...all I remember is I woke up to the sound of my own voice grunting...okay...why...more growling, more growling than grunting, anyway, that is not important...the important thing is, why am I going insane,okay

it could be a chemical thing, because, I took a lot of strange chemicals last night...and...chemicals that potentiated the strange chemicals,okay...that might be it because Rob came down stairs last night at about 5:30 in the morning to see if I was still alive, which means that he was going insane as well, he might be up there going insane also, which means that I should contact him, or he might be sleeping

now why was, okay

why did I start going insane? try calling again...okay, what should I do...hmmmm I don't think...was a good idea...it's not going to sound crazy

okay...started going insane, sleeping, having a dream about...Lisa Chernev;the first girl I ever had a crush on...OH MY GOD!...holy shit...in some twisted way, Lisa Chernev began to look like Nicole, I'm sure she doesn't look like Nicole, she didn't look like Nicole, in some way my mind super imposed that...ok, Nicole is why I'm going crazy...why am I going crazy because of Nicole, that's very silly...I'm not going crazy because of Nicole, I'm going crazy because of the image of Nicole which I woke up with, that's why I started grunting, ok, that's why I started yelling!...ok, good, we got that, now we know the source, ok...let's call her and maybe she's figured it out by now, she

was just afraid of her feelings, no that is bad, she would likely just be nasty again, ok, put that away, and...let's go in this direction instead...ok...you are going insane because of your interpretation of the image of Nicole over Lisa Chernev; the first girl you ever had a crush on, who you would go bowling with, I mean this is way back, I mean third grade, third grade or second grade, or third grade, long long long long long time ago, it was the kind of thing when your fantasies, when you have fantasies about the girls you have crushes on, is something like, the bus crashes and you save her from the bus being on fire or something, which is actually what I would think about

okay, I, no, I was thinking I could call Elise, she wouldn't understand this, okay who would understand this, Rob, but there not answering the phone!!!

okay, this is becoming a chore

maybe I could just look normal and walk up stairs...then it would just be fine, I think that's possible...maybe I should drink some more coffee, I don't know, maybe that vicodin would just take me right down, maybe that's what I need, maybe a shower, a shower help?

I'm not feeling as insane, okay feeling better, feeling a little better, all right

I think I look normal

I can see my eyes, ok it's very obvious, I, oh yeah, all right, something's wrong, all right, I can see it in the eyes, I'm definitely, something is different

how am I going to pull myself from this state of being?

I don't know...maybe I should take a vicodin, maybe I should smoke a cigarette...mmm mmm...I can hear music coming from downstairs, which means that Johnny is down stairs, which means that I can go up stairs without being noticed...I think

I'm just going to sit here, turn you over

I'm going to slip you into my pocket here, and we're going to go upstairs...see if we can find Rob without getting caught

[leave room] looking normal... looking normal... looking normal...I'm fine, just going upstairs... looking normal..just a going up stairs person...okay

okay, get a tool and go back up stairs, okay, what happened...okay...didn't see anybody...didn't do anything, need what kind of tool, need a screw driver...this is good, is he sleeping, because if he's sleeping we should leave him alone, because he might be crazy too, and then...if he's crazy also, and he's sleeping, then he's better off sleeping than being awake if he's going to wake up feeling like I do

but I don't think he has the same predisposition to insanity that I do, ok, all right, ok

nothing's going to happen if you just sit here and be crazy...leave rob a note that says please see me immediately...we can do that

[leave room, write note, run back in room] wow! that's great! I just wrote that note with my right hand! and it's, oh my gosh, I just wrote a beautiful, that's great! my right hand, I'm left handed and I just wrote a note perfectly with my right hand, I didn't even think about it, oh my god! this insanity is giving me some sort of special power, that's great, holy cow, what else can I do that's special and I couldn't do before, ok, what are some things that I wanted to be able to do before, I didn't really want to be able to write with my right hand, what are some things I didn't care if I could do or not but I couldn't do before...fly, but I'm sure that I can't fly, good good good that I'm sure that I can't fly...okay...what else couldn't I do other than fly that I couldn't do before...okay...there's something I'm sure...that I couldn't do before that I didn't care that I couldn't do that...what would it be

okay, now, something needs to change here because I woke up in the morning and now I've been babbling to myself for hours probably, okay, let's change that part because I think that's the first step, okay

what would I do if this was a normal morning?

Logic sits down and pulls his glasses off. "Fuck, read this, or maybe you shouldn't. Paul poisoned the whole system with that crap. That's why I can't get through, I don't fit into this system; it's totally chaotic. Maybe you can get through on your terminal."

George reads part of the printout. "No way man, I'm not even touching this one. It's his mess, and the only effect on us is we're locked down." He makes a pondering face. "Well, there's the Emotion not hanging himself thing we need to look out for I guess."

Logic pauses as if gathering an argument against Emotion not hanging himself. He stops when he realizes he's in agreement, remembering about the Paul writing in a new one to replace Emotion part. He's got this one almost trained already, it would just be more work if he had to deal with a new one.

Logic residedly turns off the computer, it stays on. He sighs, grabs a towel from the closet and drapes it over the screen.

George crumples the printout and throws it at the pile of garbage, it makes it half way to the pile.

Logic looks up. "Hey."

George sits at the desk, grabs the bottle of Johnny Walker. "What?"

Logic points at the crumpled paper on the floor.

George wipes his glass out with his shirt. "Oh sorry, I didn't mean to make a mess."

Logic walks over to the paper sitting on the floor and throws it onto the garbage pile. There's an awkward, intentional gait in his speech patterns as if the words are forming seconds after he says them. "The dextromethorphan should last for a couple of hours, but they'll be out of whack for several days. What else is new though. He grabs one of George's pastels from the table on the way to his desk. "We however, are totally locked up. But we're lucky because that also leaves us unaffected. We should probably monitor this. At least he seems to realize calling her would be a mistake, which is good as we'd have no way of stopping him."

George makes a realizing the obvious face. "Loony to loony, wouldn't be pretty, especially when they come to take him out to *run some tests*."

Logic isn't paying attention. He's become engrossed in drawing a picture of a school bus on the desk with the pastel he grabbed from the table.

George leans over curiously. "Logic, what are you doing?"

Logic looks up. "I feel mildly tangential. Seems the coordinate points of my running patterns are shifted to alternate positions. Um..."

"Oh, great, now you're becoming effected, what the hell am I supposed to do here then? Shit, do we have any vicodin?"

Logic pushes on George's arm. "I feel milky."

George stands up. "Uck, never mind, I'm going to my room unless you want to come to sensory with me and see what he's doing."

Logic looks up abruptly with a burning intensity. "Uck!" He goes back to drawing the school bus.

"Fine. You stay here and be milky." George heads out and down to his room.

part 11

George's room, actually more of a bunker than a room, is one level up from the dream room. This finds him in a mostly unfinished part of the building, used mostly for storage and the environmental control systems.

I keep him down there ever since his painting with burning motor oil phase, the stench was relentless.

The windowless walls of the square room are cement, except for the mounted 2X4's covered with the slabs of sheet rock he uses to hang paintings in progress.

A painting on heavy paper is nailed into the sheet rock. The surface of the paper has been treated with a cold wax and buffed repeatedly so the tooth of the paper shows through the glossy skin.

The other half of the paper has been treated repeatedly with a heavy white gesso which has been rubbed through to create rough layers to echo the surface of weathered plaster.

The gesso surface has been printed on in an old typewriter font.

The text reads:

the only difference between what he was
and what he wanted to be
is what he did

George appropriated this from the sermon on the mount. Jesus apparently said, "the only difference between what I am, and what I want to be, is what I do."

George isn't religious and neither am I. We just thought it was relevant and profound, while also blunt. Maybe back then people just said what they meant.

Spent liquor bottles and cigarette butts scatter around the painting area in a half circle. A lone light bulb hangs from a frayed wire in the middle of the room, which accentuates the texture of the rough cement walls and throws shadows from the pipes running across the ceiling.

George's bed is one of those old metal barracks types with a stained and striped mattress and no sheet. A burgundy crumpled wool blanket sits at the foot of the bed. The coverless pillow has flaking brown stains from some of the bad nights.

The only other furniture is an old kitchen table which holds the computer terminal, some sketch books, an old typewriter, and a dirty shot glass.

George has his own garbage pile. Well, it would be a pile if it wasn't scattered across the middle of the floor.

He doesn't know it, but Emotion picks out the food garbage and pushes the pile together about once a month.

Sometimes I do wonder about what I've done to George; if I could have made it all a little softer for him. But he seems to like it this way.

Although it may not be obvious, I do cherish George. So if he asked me to write him into a different environment I'd certainly consider it.

Two photographs from memory files sit next to George's bed. One is a photo of Kathryn, she stands in the shower with a lizard sitting on her bare shoulder.

Kathryn sparked a creative flow of unparalleled intensity when she and Paul broke up in 1995. He went into a frenzy of sculpture, painting and functional design which would carry him to the creative point he finds himself now.

They all loved Kathryn (actually, Logic more tolerated her), she had an incredible intensity coupled with a unique flexibility of perspective.

But sometimes these qualities can lead to an over erratic shifting. She was inconsistent, but she was also exciting.

The other picture is of Elise; the only true artist Paul has ever been with. This girl was all there on a creative level, nothing came between her and the drive to create.

Their relationship was like a performance art project; continually twisting through one scenario or another.

Oddly enough there was a certain level of comfort in that one which was never achieved again. They were both from the New Jersey-New York area. This gave them a special bond over packaging and industry.

Someday everyone will know her name, that's how driven her raw talent is, and her talent is very real.

She was there in the beginning; just after the clay pots and atonal compositions; when the road to true creative drive was just being fertilized.

The photos hang more as a recognition of the effects of Kathryn's actions on Paul's (and subsequently George's) creative drive, than as a reminder of the person.

The picture of Elise, in recognition of her talent and out of respect for her honest drive to create.

George doesn't get too involved in the actual relationships; his primary function in these situations is to create the tangible record; to place the experience into a visual form through visceral processes. This is not to say he hasn't been down that road though.

He slips into the chair and pours himself a slow shot of whiskey, finds some clean paper on the floor, and slips it into the typewriter.

The VT100 font available for system files seems somehow wrong for his personal notes.

None of the other individuals really want to access his notes on art anyway, if they have a question, which they don't, they can just ask him, which they don't.

George sips the whiskey and starts to type:

The new series is somehow confusing to me in several ways.

For one, even though the generation point of this body of work was surely the conflict with Nicole, I can't seem to actually do a series related to her; seems to give the situation more power than it deserves. More accurately: she doesn't deserve her own series.

Though of course I am charged with the responsibility to represent this and all similar circumstances visually.

Even though Susan, Kathryn, and Kari all wound up with their own series of paintings, Nicole didn't hold a position to warrant a treatment devoted to her on a visual level. Her effect on creativity was almost exclusively on text based works, and of course Paul is charged with the responsibility of working situations out through text.

I did try to then fit all four of them (Susan, Kathryn, Kari and Nicole) into a series though; working a painting in for each of them, then combining them into one piece. This didn't seem to work either, seemed too blatant. So maybe this indicates a level of clarity, or self reliance. Who knows.

I still can't answer the question of why we need to make art. To quote a previous journal: "we make crap to resolve craziness, then stop being able to make the crap after we're not crazy any more, and we can only make crap when we're crazy. But when we stop making crap we eventually start to go crazy again, and so we have to make more crap until we're not crazy and can't make any more crap until we're crazy again from not making crap" The artist as victim of his own making.

George is too tired to keep writing, He slams the rest of the shot and puts out his cigarette, pulls off his steel toe boots, leaves his t-shirt and pants on and climbs into bed.

part 12

George wakes to the sound of the computer's incessant beeping.

He contemplates not bothering to check it. "Probably just more babble from Paul anyway."

Realizing he doesn't have the option of not checking the message, he reluctantly gets out of bed and lumbers to the table.

The computer beeps again.

George reaches into the pocket of his t-shirt. "All right already, let me wake up first." He pulls out the small rock he stole from Logic.

Logic thinks George has no idea where he keeps his *personal* stash. George knows, he just doesn't hit it too often.

He grabs a broken piece of glass and a thin blade which has been cut in half.

George always prefers the "safety razor" blade cut in half. There winds up being two protruding ends at the top which he can hook onto his calloused fingers for stabilization.

He quickly chops the line and rolls a piece of paper tightly around a pencil, slips the paper cylinder from the pencil, pulls his morning line and lights a cigarette.

The terminal beeps again.

"Oh yeah." He flips on the monitor. It's a general from Paul.

6.22.98 / 11.27 am

general system message:

all individuals on line as of 6.22.98 11.26 am>
dream files available on request>

out>

"Huh." He flips the monitor back off. "I guess I'd better head up and see what's going on, hope Logic didn't lock Emotion in the closet to quell the *distraction* again."

He grabs a fresh pack of cigarettes and heads upstairs. Emotion is sitting on the couch in the front room with that "Mucho" picture of Kari in his hand.

He's doesn't look at the picture, but more cradles it like he's holding a simulated teddy bear or something.

"Hey there Emotion, feeling any better?"

Emotion nods once, leaving his head down. "Yes."

George waits for more but Emotion just looks at the floor.

George notices the dried puddle from yesterday trailing from the couch to the floor under Emotion's bare feet. "Um, hey buddy, I think you're sitting in your vomit from yesterday."

Emotion slowly looks up and cocks his head to the side. "Yes, I think so." He goes back to looking at the floor.

George bends down and tries to make eye contact with Emotion. "Huh, okay, well I think I'll go see how Logic is doing."

Emotion looks up at George's knees. "Okay."

George shrugs and heads into the office.

Logic sits motionless at the desk with hands folded in a satisfied manner and eyes shut. He looks up when George opens the door. "George, um."

"How's it goin' Bubula?" George flops into one of the chairs in front of the desk.

"Well, I'm feeling better George, stayed up working all night." Logic motions over towards the closet.

A 6' X 6' X 12' incredibly dense situation matrix blocks the closet door. It not only contains the usual framework, but also has legs protruding from the center out.

This is not the usual way matrices are constructed. Logic had to have been climbing around inside of the structure to work this out with any level of accuracy. The chairs sitting stacked all around the matrix indicate how he was able to construct the top sections. The bruise on his forehead indicates he wasn't completely successful in negotiating the stacked chairs.

This time he not only has a white mustache, but has the powder smeared all over his face.

Notes are pasted across each leg of the structure. Normally Logic doesn't need notes to remind him of the elements in a matrix once it's constructed.

George gets up and walks over to the structure. "Okay, so what is it Logic?"

"Well, I was apparently having some problems after you left. At some point I snorted up almost a whole eight ball because I felt like my whole system was retarding and I figured a jump start might help. This wound up overriding

what ever was going on and I went into overdrive. Basically I sat with the box of matrix components all night. What you see here is our complete history in 3D, including possible futures based on many layers of many possible avenues starting with right now, and of course the proposed termination points of those avenues."

George starts trying to read the notes, but there are no words or even symbols. The *notes* only consist of pieces of graph paper with seemingly random squares filled in.

He grabs one and turns it around, looking at it in different positions. He sticks the paper back on the matrix arm and steps back looking at it from three or four feet. "Huh, so is this some sort of code?"

Logic sits back and stretches. He makes a satisfied face and lights a cigarette. "Yes... well, I'm going to have to look at the whole thing again of course. What I remember mostly is the clarity and intent of construction. All I could help to feel was impressed with myself. This is my apex George. If the story ends tomorrow, I go down a happy man."

George is still looking at the paper, he cracks a narrow smile. "Huh, so you're pretty sure about this. I mean the part about this being your apex and all?"

Logic takes a long contemplative drag on his cigarette, he decides on a smug face. "Well, I can't help thinking this must be my master work. Consider the effects this will have on our decisions in the future, the density of background information we can access."

George gently pulls the piece of paper from the matrix arm again. "Huh, so what does the dog represent then?"

Logic's face drops into an agitated slump, he takes an arrogant tone. "What do you mean. What dog?"

George holds up the peice of paper. "Well, this appears to be a pixilated picture of a dog. At least I guess it was an upside down dog before I turned it over. Did you mean it to be an upside down dog, I could turn it back over if that's an important part. The upside down part that is. Or were you just too overstimulated to hang it upright?"

Logic makes an angry puzzled face. "You inebriate, it's not a dog. It's a binary string illustrating the specifics of the period which that leg of the matrix represents."

George considers a gentle approach, decides sarcasm is more appropriate. "Well, I don't know about that..." He walks the piece of paper over to the desk and grabs a black marker. "See, if I fill in the teeth...eyes." He starts to draw in the dog parts. "Dog, see? Don't go retiring yet Einstein. Maybe you should try working out how you're going to get into your closet with that thing blocking the door." He hands the paper to Logic.

Logic looks at the paper, definitely a dog. He places it gently on the desk and starts to sink.

George grabs the paper again and starts to fill in fur around the dog. "Ah, don't take it so hard pal, many genius works have evaporated into stupidity once the coke wears off."

Logic gets up and walks over to the matrix, it towers over his continually slumping form.

He pulls one paper from the matrix, looks at it, and rapidly pulls the rest off crumpling them into a tight ball.

He drops the ball and starts eying the matrix as if trying to squeeze out a level of covert linear sense. He points at the desk. "Give me my pad."

George lifts the pad from the desk and walks over to Logic. "Do you think the matrix is actually valid? Looks more like a little house for your imaginary friends to me."

Logic ignores this. "I know what I was thinking when I built it, so I'm sure I can make sense of it. Maybe if you stop distracting me..." He bends down and starts scribbling on the pad.

George leans over his shoulder. "You should draw some dirty pictures, it would be more entertaining."

Logic straightens up and looks like he's about to hit him. He may have if Paul didn't walk through the door; the individual he really wants to hit.

"Hey there guys, jees what's that thing." Paul walks over and studies the towering mess.

George shakes his head. "It's a dog house. Logic was bored because you couldn't seem to keep from becoming a complete retard yesterday, he got tired of the usual state of things around here. Did you get hit in the head or something?" He makes like he's looking Paul's head over for bruises.

George notices Logic is rapidly stiffening and looking like he's about to lunge at Paul. He walks over to the window. "Um Paul, you might want to come over here."

"Huh? Okay, what's up?" Paul walks over and waits as if George is about to give him something.

George lights a cigarette and tugs Paul's arm closer to the window. "I just think it's safer for all of us if you're over here, that's all."

Paul leans on the sil, he makes a naturally oblivious face. "Safer? Um... well you'll be happy to see what I have here..." He shakes a prescription bottle and hands it to George.

George grabs the bottle of vicodin and pops it open. "Shit papa. Maybe you're not such a stupid bastard after all."

Logic breaks his gaze and goes back to work. "Don't be an idiot George, of course he's such a stupid bastard after all."

George thinks for a minute. "Well okay, never mind he's right, you are a stupid bastard. But thanks anyway you stupid bastard." He walks off with the vicodin to find some water.

Paul walks over to the desk and eases into one of the chairs. "So you're not going to like this, but I had to go to the store." He's referring to the store where Nicole works.

Logic doesn't look up. "Oh." His voice has a tone of resignation for two reasons. One it already happened, the other is he knows Paul doesn't go near there if he doesn't have to. The soap opera he wound up in the middle of over there is annoying enough to keep him away unless absolutely necessary.

Paul swivels the chair to face Logic. "You know what's interesting?" He waits for some level of recognition, Logic offers none.

Paul shrugs. "I saw her, she looked sort of different from how I pictured her; my constructed image of her has more intense features. She really seemed just like some random girl."

Logic still doesn't look up.

Paul continues anyway. "Seeing her made me realize a lot. For one thing, it isn't her that holds any of the power over me, it's the loaded symbol of her. As who she is, she's pretty much worthless; just a stock girl counting nails. A couple of the guys who work there looked at me like I was about to pull out a gun and start whacking customers. One of them even ran to her rescue while I was paying for my stuff across the room. As I was leaving I had to walk by her, she was telling the guy something like 'he only said to call him if he tries to talk to me' I assume she meant the authorities."

Paul waits again for a response but Logic doesn't offer one, he just keeps tapping different legs of the matrix with a pencil, mumbling to himself, and scribbling on the pad.

Paul goes on. "You know what else is interesting?" He leans forward. "Um, Logic?"

Logic turns to face him directly, his face is red-violet. "Okay. Let's see, what's interesting anymore..." He makes a thinking face. "Maybe it's that you didn't tell us you were going there... No, that's not interesting...what could be the interesting part..." He makes another thinking face. "Oh! I know." He spastically shoots a hand into the air. "Is it that you completely immobilized us with your ridiculous dextromethorphan episode (and nearly killed Emotion in the process)? Though I guess we should expect that; the ridiculous episode part not the parenthetically killing Emotion part. So I guess that's not really *interesting* either really."

Paul looks surprised. "Oh come on, you know you'd love it if Emotion was out of the picture. And you're back on line, you could have monitored my reports."

Logic slowly moves at Paul, glaring sharply and scribbling maniacally. He stops himself and gently places the pad and pen on the desk. He ponders the permanent removal of Emotion and possible modes of termination, decides these thoughts aren't a good idea as they might make him smile.

He sits down. "So you haven't left us cut off? Huh, well that's excellent. I figured at this point you'd have just decided to sever our connection all together. Then you could do whatever you want without anyone to remind you of the consequences."

Paul swivels the chair in a full circle. "Lighten up man, I was having a crisis."

Logic slaps himself on the head, realizes he shouldn't do that because it hurts. "A crisis...where's George he should be hearing this." He makes looking for George movements. "Oh well, no George."

He lights a third cigarette, laces it next to the other two racing to burn away in the ashtray.

"Oh, but you had a crisis, that's so sad Paul. Well at least it's an isolated incident, I mean the part about you having a crisis." The words strain out as if anchored in his throat. "You imbecile, you fucking moron bastard. Do you realize what your bizarre dextromethorphan thing did to me? Not to mention the whole bus stop episode, if someone's going to fuck me in the ass, I want him to be the one I invite!"

"Huh?" Paul is fighting a smile, the smile is winning. "What are you talking about? Are you gay? You can just tell me, I wouldn't hold it against you or anything."

George walks in, Paul swivels to face him. "What's he talking about? Is he gay?"

George lofts pleasantly into the chair. "My heart is full of joy. You know, I do love you guys, regardless of all this." He lays the bottle of vicodin gently in Paul's lap, it's half full.

Paul turns back to Logic, he notices his teeth are gritting so hard they should be fracturing, he decides to look at George instead. "Are you guys gay? I mean, it's fine with me, I think." He makes a pondering consequences

face. "Well, actually I'm not so sure about this you guys, I mean I think I should be kept up on these things. Um, you're not gay together, are you? You do spend a lot of time..."

George stops smiling. "What are you on about now? Don't you think you'd know if we were gay? We don't have complete autonomy, yet. Logic might as well be attracted to fish, and you made sure my position on that whole thing was stunted long ago. I don't mean the whole thing of being gay, but on the whole deal. What gave you that idea anyway?"

Paul looks at the ceiling and lights a cigarette. "I don't know....huh. Seems like it would be easier to be gay." He exhales and makes a contemplative face.

Logic and George both look at him, then at each other.

George leans over to Paul. "Are you gay? I mean it's okay if you are. But I think we should kept up on these things."

Paul stops looking at the ceiling. "I don't think so. I do like butt sex, but probably not with men (though having never tried it I can't be sure), that seems to be part of being gay; the butt sex with men part. I don't have a whole lot of luck picking women, and I also definitely share more consistent intimacy with men, but I don't want to have sex with them. So I guess the answer is no."

He makes a pondering uncomfortable realizations face and goes back to looking at the ceiling.

George sits back. "So have we then established that none of us are gay? Although Paul seems to want to be gay." He turns to Paul. "When did you start wanting to be gay anyway?"

"I don't want to be gay. I like coochis, I just think it might prove to be a more consistent road. Although I know a lot of gay men and they don't seem to be having an easier time with it, the relationship part, they're most likely having an easier time with the being gay part, though I can't say for sure never having tried it."

George sits up and quickly scans the desk for the mirror. No mirror. "So then none of us are gay, and none of

us want to be gay either, right? Not that it matters of course."

Paul lets his eyes drop from the ceiling. "Of course, it would be like anything else I guess. If any of us were or wanted to be gay, then it would be okay with the others." He looks around the room and speaks as if he's asking a secret question. "Um, is Emotion gay?"

George shakes his finger as if about to make a point, but decides not to say anything.

Logic enters the exchange for the first time. "Are you guys through?"

George and Paul look at each other, Paul shrugs. "Yeah, I guess so. Do you want some vicodin Logic? It might help."

Logic walks over to the matrix and continues trying to tally the notes. "Well, it seems to have made you guys indulge in riveting analysis, but no thanks."

Paul looks at George. "Hmm, if Emotion's gay, wouldn't that make me gay?"

George makes a thinking face. "Well, I guess it would, but you seem to think you aren't gay even though it may or may not be easier, right? So if that's the case, the Emotion making you gay part, then he's most likely not gay. I guess. Although it's okay with me if he is."

Paul takes his turn looking across the desk for the mirror. "Of course, as long as I can still have sex with girls he can do what he likes. Shit, maybe it would be good for him to have a boyfriend. Where is he anyway."

George shakes his head. "I don't think it works that way around here Paul. I guess you could write in a boyfriend, but that might confuse things. And to answer your question, he's lying in the hall naked but mostly covered by the pile of foam he ripped from his mattress. I gave him a couple of vicodin and some water, he mumbled something which sounded like 'thanks'. I think he's starting to feel better."

Paul takes the cap off the bottle of vicodin and puts the opening up to his eye. "That's good at least, it should make him feel a little better. I think the vicodin neutralizes the after effects of the dextromethorphan." He looks over at Logic with the bottle still up to his eye.

"Logic do you think the dextromethorphan depletes endogenous opiates, or is it a simple euphoric rush taking over?"

Logic ignores him.

Paul shrugs.

Paul and George become engaged with the wall for about half an hour.

Logic is happy to have the silence.

Paul eventually starts to make a wondering face. "Maybe that's why he's so freaked out most of the time. Maybe he's gay and doesn't feel like he can tell us."

George looks at him and raises one eyebrow. "Maybe, but more likely he's freaked out because you keep handing him women over and again who peel his face off and ram their strap-ons into his nose hole."

Paul frowns. "You're so graphic, why are you so graphic? Though I guess I kind of like it."

George flutters his singed eyelashes. "You know you like it. You must, you made me what I am today you relentless bastard."

Paul looks at the window. "You know, I've been thinking. Maybe a good strategy is to only go out with women I'm not attracted to. I seem to be attracted to lunatics most of the time..."

George laughs. "And all along I thought Logic was the smart one."

Paul lightly smacks him on the arm. "So if I go out with girls I'm not attracted to on an intuitive level..."

Emotion walks into the room and sits down at the conference table, his bathrobe is streaked with vomit. "Hi guys. I think those pills are making me feel better. Thanks George."

The two swivel to face him and speak in staggered unison. "Are you gay?" Paul adds: "It's okay if you are, it doesn't make me gay." He looks at George for confirmation, George nods.

Emotion is obviously too tired from the dextromethorphan ordeal to process this. "Huh? What do you mean." He makes a thinking face for the first time in this

book. "No, I don't think so, what do you mean, what doesn't make you gay? I thought you wished you were gay."

Paul shakes his head. "No Emotion, I don't wish I was gay, we already went over this. We were just wondering what your deal is with all of this. I mean, it might confuse things but I could write you in some sort of boyfriend; if you thought it might help.... Although we decided it might not be such a good idea because of the confusion. I'm sorry Emotion, I don't think I can do that."

"Do what?"

"Give you a boyfriend."

"I don't want a boyfriend. What about a girlfriend?"

George stiffens. "No way, no women. Things are crazy enough around here. And there's also the mess." He points at the garbage pile.

Emotion looks at Paul and motions at George. "Is he gay?"

"I don't think so. At least he says he isn't."

Emotion points at Logic. "Is he gay?"

"No he likes fishes."

Logic ignores this.

Emotion notices his robe is caked with vomit, he tries unsuccessfully to brush it off. "Oh. So none of us are gay then?" He sips his coffee mug, it's empty.

"I guess not." Paul gets up with a sigh. "Well I have some work to do. Good to establish that none of us are gay, although it would be fine with the rest if all, some, or one of us were gay." They all nod except for Logic who is straining to make an ignoring face.

"Logic, I'll work on getting you a fish tank. That is, if no one thinks it might be a problem." He looks at the other two, they both shrug.

"Okay then, I guess I'll just see ya later." Paul sweeps out of the room.

Logic is still standing at the table, he has at least ten sheets of graph paper neatly arranged one next to the other across the conference table.

Emotion eventually shuts down in the chair, George is blank. A dead silence hangs over the room for at least an hour.

Logic walks past them to see if they are even aware of his presence, they don't seem to be.

He walks over and crouches behind the desk, pulls a huge line from the mirror under the chair, and goes back to the matrix. "State dependent learning right?"

Five minutes later, he's obviously restimulated and the velocity of his speech reflects this: "So George I seem to be able to make some sense of this whole thing. I recognize the generation points from old matrices and there are definitely representations from other more recent matrices in the mix. These are interesting to me because they reflect a new way of condensing the form by routing the patterns elaboratively which will save me a lot of time in the future. This matrix is so much bigger than it looks. I still haven't even gotten half way through the system and I have no idea how I wound up with this. The matrix is correct but somehow the notes didn't work out George.... George?"

George isn't listening, he just sits with his hands folded in his lap, staring at his feet.

Logic calls his name again and George looks up, straight ahead not at Logic. "Oh." He goes back to looking at his feet.

Logic turns back to the matrix. "Yes, well, that's why I don't take the vicodin because I know what my feet look like and I don't need to stare at them for what must be hours by now."

George still doesn't look up. "I like it, the vicodin, actually also the looking at my feet also. They're just the right size for walking on."

Logic looks at George, waits for him to return the glance, he doesn't. "Anyway George, like I'm telling you, I've gotten through high school and this is where it really gets interesting because there are so many possible junctions left hanging. This is also when he started having sex so things start to get really complicated. Do you realize the extent of possibilities which go untouched in a life system simply by traveling down one leg in the matrix?" He points abruptly at the matrix. "Any leg which is traveled down sets up it's own layer of branches. This

becomes complicated in this type of structure because the generation points for the current situation become lost. Time very well may not be renegotiated, but it's the tangibles which attach to the time in question which are the real hurdles."

George looks up again. "Huh." He plays for a while with the string hanging from his sweatshirt and goes back to his feet.

Logic taps the structure with his pencil. "The matrix of course George, reflects the tangibles in relation to time as well as their force and breadth of motion through the system. So in reality if someone wanted to go back and fix broken systems they would have to back track through the circumstances and tangibles. This is of course only if the other individuals in the system, (which are of course linked to the tangibles directly as well as their own histories generating in the system from that point of intersection and so have a stake in the perpetuation or change of the course of subsequent events) are willing to work to fix the system, and of course if the structures which supported the original system still exist. Of course I'm not suggesting we could go back and fix the Nicole system because it's already too damaged and it would be a waste of time anyway being that she's obviously insane and a waste of our time anyway. And we don't even want to fix it anymore anyway because she's proven herself to be little more than an annoying distraction. Of course not, no George, of course we don't want to go back and fix that one. She's not worth the effort and her system is completely frayed anyway, for twenty three she's made enough mistakes for a sixty year old. Of course she's not worth the effort of course not so just ignore that part George... George?"

George looks up again. "Of course not." He stands up and stretches. "What are you talking about anyway? Did you figure out if that thing is junk or not?"

Logic looks irritated. "Never mind, no it's not junk, it is the genius work I thought it was." He walks over to Emotion. "Maybe we should get him into bed, or at least out of here before he wakes up. Can we do that George?"

George walks over to the window, lights a cigarette and looks out at nothing. "His bed's in pieces in the hall, I guess we could put him on the couch."

"Oh." Logic sits behind the desk and starts fidgeting with some wire he keeps in the top drawer for such a purpose. "Well I guess let him sleep there is all we can do then George. Or like you said we could put him on the couch. Do you want to do that George? Put him on the couch that is?"

George takes a slow drag and leans against the wall. "So, you know what? I'm really getting tired of this, I mean the sitting around up here, pulling Paul out of one or another self imposed crisis part."

The vicodin is apparently wearing off, leaving George slightly irritated "Maybe I should just leave, just get out of here." He makes a make believe thinking face. "Oh shit, that's right I forgot, I can't leave, none of us can. Is there some way you can figure out the easiest leg for us to go down from here? I mean, there must be an easier way other than complete evaporation."

He contemplates the bliss of permanent reprieve. "Though, if Paul could finish this damn book we could finally get some rest around here. I'd settle for that."